

**HUMAN SOCIETY  
IN ETHICS AND POLITICS**

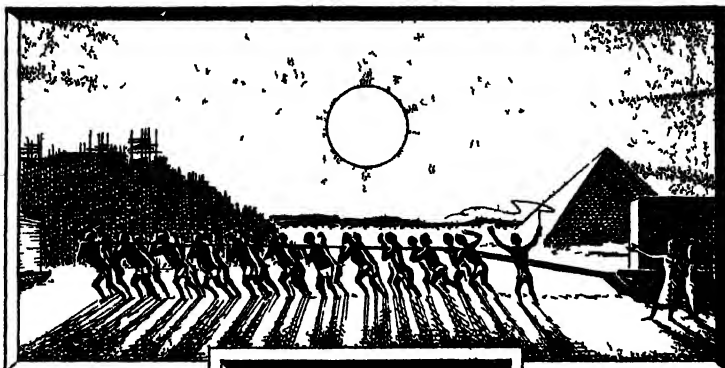
BY BERTRAND RUSSELL

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THE PRESENT



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BERTRAND RUSSELL

*Human Society  
in Ethics  
and  
Politics*



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## PREFACE\*

THE first nine chapters of this book were written in 1945-6, the rest in 1953, except Chapter II of Part II, which was the lecture I gave in Stockholm on the occasion of receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature. I had originally intended to include the discussion of ethics in my book on "Human Knowledge," but I decided not to do so because I was uncertain as to the sense in which ethics can be regarded as "knowledge".

This book has two purposes: first, to set forth an undogmatic ethic; and second, to apply this ethic to various current political problems. There is nothing startlingly original in the ethic developed in the first Part of this book, and I am not sure that I should have thought it worth while to set it forth, except for the fact that, when I make ethical judgments on political questions, I am constantly told by critics that I have no right to do so, since I do not believe in the objectivity of ethical judgments. I do not think this criticism valid, but to show that it is not valid requires certain developments which cannot be altogether brief.

The second Part of this book does not attempt to be a complete theory of politics. I have dealt with various parts of the theory of politics in previous books, and in this book I deal only with those parts that, in addition to being closely related to ethics, are of urgent practical importance in the present day. I have hoped that, by setting out actual problems in a large impersonal framework, I may cause them to be viewed with less heat, less fanaticism, and a smaller amount of worry and fret than is easily possible when they are viewed only in a contemporary context.

I hope also that this book, which is concerned throughout with human passions and their effect upon human destiny, may help to dispel a misunderstanding not only of what I have written, but of everything written by those with whom I am

in broad agreement. Critics are in the habit of making a certain accusation against me which seems to imply that they approach my writings with a preconception so strong that they are unable to notice what, in fact, I say. I am told over and over again that I over-estimate the part of reason in human affairs. This may mean that I think either that people are, or that they ought to be, more rational than my critics believe them to be. But I think there is a prior error on the part of my critics, which is that they, not I, irrationally over-estimate the part which reason is capable of playing, and this comes I think from the fact that they are in complete confusion as to what the word "reason" means.

"Reason" has a perfectly clear and precise meaning. It signifies the choice of the right means to an end that you wish to achieve. It has nothing whatever to do with the choice of ends. But opponents of reason do not realize this, and think that advocates of rationality want reason to dictate ends as well as means. They have no excuse for this view in the writings of rationalists. There is a famous sentence: "Reason is and ought only to be, the slave of the passions." This sentence does not come from the works of Rousseau or Dostoevsky or Sartre. It comes from David Hume. It expresses a view to which I, like every man who attempts to be reasonable, fully subscribe. When I am told, as I frequently am, that I "almost entirely discount the part played by the emotions in human affairs," I wonder what motive-force the critic supposes me to regard as dominant. Desires, emotions, passions (you can choose whichever word you will), are the only possible causes of action. Reason is not a cause of action but only a regulator. If I wish to travel by plane to New York, reason tells me that it is better to take a plane which is going to New York than one which is going to Constantinople. I suppose that those who think me unduly rational, consider that I ought to become so agitated at the airport as to jump into the first plane that I see, and when it lands me in Constantinople I ought to curse

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the people among whom I find myself for being Turks and not Americans. This would be a fine, full-blooded way of behaving, and would, I suppose, meet with the commendation of my critics.

One critic takes me to task because I say that only evil passions prevent the realization of a better world, and goes on triumphantly to ask, "are all human emotions necessarily evil?" In the very book that leads my critic to this objection, I say that what the world needs is Christian love, or compassion. This, surely, is an emotion, and, in saying that this is what the world needs, I am not suggesting reason as a driving force. I can only suppose that this emotion, because it is neither cruel nor destructive, is not attractive to the apostles of unreason.

Why, then, is there this violent passion which causes people, when they read me, to be unable to notice even the plainest statement, and to go on comfortably thinking that I say the exact opposite of what I do say? There are several motives which may lead people to hate reason. You may have incompatible desires and not wish to realize that they are incompatible. You may wish to spend more than your income and yet remain solvent. And this may cause you to hate your friends when they point out the cold facts of arithmetic. You may, if you are an old-fashioned schoolmaster, wish to consider yourself full of universal benevolence, and at the same time derive great pleasure from caning boys. In order to reconcile these two desires you have to persuade yourself that caning has a reformatory influence. If a psychiatrist tells you that it has no such influence on some peculiarly irritating class of young sinners, you will fly into a rage and accuse him of being coldly intellectual. There is a splendid example of this pattern in the furious diatribe of the great Dr. Arnold of Rugby against those who thought ill of flogging.

There is another, more sinister, motive for liking irrationality. If men are sufficiently irrational, you may be able to induce them to serve your interests under the impression that

they are serving their own. This case is very common in politics. Most political leaders acquire their position by causing large numbers of people to believe that these leaders are actuated by altruistic desires. It is well understood that such a belief is more readily accepted under the influence of excitement. Brass bands, mob oratory, lynching, and war, are stages in the development of the excitement. I suppose the advocates of unreason think that there is a better chance of profitably deceiving the populace if they keep it in a state of effervescence. Perhaps it is my dislike of this sort of process which leads people to say that I am unduly rational.

But I would put to these men a dilemma: since reason consists in a just adaptation of means to ends, it can only be opposed by those who think it a good thing that people should choose means which cannot realize their professed ends. This implies either that they should be deceived as to how to realize their professed ends, or that their real ends should not be those that they profess. The first is the case of a populace misled by an eloquent *fuehrer*. The second is that of the schoolmaster who enjoys torturing boys, but wishes to go on thinking himself a benevolent humanitarian. I cannot feel that either of these grounds for opposing reason is morally respectable.

There is another ground upon which some people oppose what they imagine to be reason. They think that strong emotions are desirable, and that no one who feels a strong emotion will be reasonable about it. They seem to think that any person who feels strongly must lose his head and behave in a silly manner which they applaud because it shows him to be passionate. They do not, however, think in this way when self-deception would have consequences that they would dislike. No one, for example, holds that a general ought to hate the enemy so passionately as to become hysterical and incapable of rational planning. It is not, in fact, the case that strong passions prevent a just estimate of means. There are people, like the Comte de Monte Cristo, who have burning passions

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leading them straight to the right choice of means. Do not tell me that that worthy man's aims were irrational. There is no such thing as an irrational aim except in the sense of one that is impossible of realization. Nor are cold calculators always conventionally wicked. Lincoln calculated coldly in the American Civil War and was roundly abused by the Abolitionists who, as apostles of passion, wished him to adopt measures that looked vigorous but would not have led to emancipation.

I suppose the essence of the matter is this: that I do not think it a good thing to be in that state of insane excitement in which people do things that have consequences directly opposite to what they intend, as, for example, when they get themselves killed in running across a street because they could not stop to notice the traffic. Those who praise such behaviour must either wish to practise successful hypocrisy or be the victims of some self-deception which they cannot bear to surrender. I am not ashamed of thinking ill of both these states of mind, and if it is for thinking ill of them that I am accused of excessive rationality, I plead guilty. But if it is supposed that I dislike strong emotion, or that I think anything except emotion can be a cause of action, then I most emphatically deny the charge. The world that I should wish to see is one where emotions are strong but not destructive, and where, because they are acknowledged, they lead to no deception either of oneself or of others. Such a world would include love and friendship and the pursuit of art and knowledge. I cannot hope to satisfy those who want something more tigerish.





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## INTRODUCTION

THE life of man may be viewed in many different ways. He may be viewed as one species of mammal and considered in a purely biological light. From this point of view his success has been overwhelming. He can live in all climates and in every part of the world where there is water. His numbers have increased and are increasing still faster. He owes his success to certain things which distinguish him from other animals: speech, fire, agriculture, writing, tools, and large-scale co-operation.

It is in the matter of co-operation that he fails of complete success. Man, like other animals, is filled with impulses and passions which, on the whole, ministered to survival while man was emerging. But his intelligence has shown him that passions are often self-defeating, and that his desires could be more satisfied, and his happiness more complete, if certain of his passions were given less scope and others more. Man has not viewed himself at most times and in most places as a species competing with other species. He has been interested, not in man, but in men; and men have been sharply divided into friends and enemies. At times this division has been useful to those who emerged victorious: for example, in the conflict between white men and red Indians. But as intelligence and invention increase the complexity of social organization, there is a continual growth in the benefits of co-operation, and a continual diminution of the benefits of competition. Ethics and moral codes are necessary to man because of the conflict between intelligence and impulse. Given intelligence only, or impulse only, there would be no place for ethics.

Men are passionate, headstrong, and rather mad. By their madness they inflict upon themselves, and upon others, disasters which may be of immense magnitude. But, although the life of impulse is dangerous, it must be preserved if human existence

is not to lose its savour. Between the two poles of impulse and control, an ethic by which men can live happily must find a middle point. It is through this conflict in the inmost nature of man that the need for ethics arises.

Man is more complex in his impulses and desires than any other animal, and from this complexity his difficulties spring. He is neither completely gregarious, like ants and bees, nor completely solitary, like lions and tigers. He is a semi-gregarious animal. Some of his impulses and desires are social, some are solitary. The social part of his nature appears in the fact that solitary confinement is a very severe form of punishment; the other part appears in love of privacy and unwillingness to speak to strangers. Graham Wallas, in his excellent book *Human Nature in Politics*, points out that men who live in a crowded area such as London develop a defence mechanism of social behaviour designed to protect them from an unwelcome excess of human contacts. People sitting next to each other in a bus or a suburban train usually do not speak to each other, but if something alarming occurs, such as an air raid or even an unusually thick fog, the strangers at once begin to feel each other to be friends and converse without restraint. This sort of behaviour illustrates the oscillation between the private and the social parts of human nature. It is because we are not completely social that we have need of ethics to suggest purposes, and of moral codes to inculcate rules of action. Ants, it seems, have no such need: they behave always as the interests of their community dictate.

But man, even if he could bring himself to be as submissive to public interest as the ant, would not feel complete satisfaction, and would be aware that a part of his nature which seems to him important was being starved. It cannot be said that the solitary part of human nature is less to be valued than the social part. In religious phraseology, the two appear separately in the two commandments of the Gospels to love God and to love our neighbour. For those who no longer believe in the

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God of traditional theology, a certain change of phraseology may be necessary, but not a fundamental change as to ethical values. The mystic, the poet, the artist, and the scientific discoverer are in their inmost being solitary. What they do may be useful to others, and its usefulness may be an encouragement to them, but, in the moments when they are most alive and most completely fulfilling what they feel to be their function, they are not thinking of the rest of mankind but are pursuing a vision.

We must therefore admit two distinct elements in human excellence, one social, the other solitary. An ethic which takes account only of the one, or only of the other, will be incomplete and unsatisfying.

The need of ethics in human affairs arises not only from man's incomplete gregariousness or from his failure to live up to an inner vision; it arises also from another difference between man and other animals. The actions of human beings do not all spring from direct impulse, but are capable of being controlled and directed by conscious purpose. To some slight extent higher animals possess this faculty. A dog will allow his master to hurt him in pulling a thorn out of his foot. Köhler's apes did various uninstinctive things in the endeavour to reach bananas. Nevertheless, it remains true even with the higher animals that most of their acts are inspired by direct impulse. This is not true of civilized man. From the moment when he gets out of bed in spite of a passionate desire to remain lying down, to the moment when he finds himself alone in the evening, he has few opportunities of acting on impulse except by finding fault with underlings and choosing the least disagreeable of the foods offered for his mid-day meal. In all other respects he is guided, not by impulse, but by deliberate purpose. What he does, he does, not because the act is pleasant, but because he hopes that it will bring him money or some other reward. It is because of this power of acting with a view to a desired end that ethics and moral rules are effective, since they suggest, on the one hand, a distinction between good and bad purposes, and, on

the other hand, a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate means of achieving purposes. But it is easy in dealing with civilized man to lay too much stress on conscious purpose and too little on the importance of spontaneous impulse.<sup>1</sup> The moralist is tempted to ignore the claims of human nature, and, if he does so, it is likely that human nature will ignore the claims of the moralist.

Ethics, though primarily individual even when it deals with duty to others, is faced with its most difficult problems when it comes to consider social groups. Wisdom as regards the action of social groups requires a scientific study of human nature in society, if we are to be able to judge what is possible and what impossible. The first thing is to be clear as to the important motives governing the behaviour of individuals and groups. Of these the most imperative are those concerned with survival, such as food and shelter and clothing and reproduction. But, when these are secure, other motives become immensely strong. Of these, acquisitiveness, rivalry, vanity, and love of power are the most important. Most of the political actions of groups and their leaders can be traced to these four motives, together with what is necessary for survival.

Every human being, after the first few days of his life, is a product of two factors: on the one hand, there is his congenital endowment; and on the other hand, there is the effect of environment, including education. There have been endless controversies as to the relative importance of these two factors. Pre-Darwinian reformers, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, attributed almost everything to education; but, since Darwin, there has been a tendency to lay stress on heredity as opposed to environment. The controversy, of course, can be only as to the degree of importance of the two factors. Everyone must admit that each plays its part. Without attempting to reach any decision as to the matters in debate,

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller treatment of this matter, see Chapter I of *Principles of Social Reconstruction* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.).

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we may assert pretty confidently that the impulses and desires which determine the behaviour of an adult depend to an enormous extent upon his education and his opportunities. The importance of this arises through the fact that some impulses, when they exist in two human beings or in two groups of human beings, are such as essentially involve strife, since the satisfaction of the one is incompatible with the satisfaction of the other; while there are other impulses and desires which are such that the satisfaction of one individual or group is a help, or at least not a hindrance, to the satisfaction of the other. The same distinction applies, though in a lesser degree, in an individual life. I may desire to get drunk tonight and to have my faculties at their very best tomorrow morning. These desires get in each other's way. Borrowing a term from Leibniz's account of possible worlds, we may call two desires or impulses "compossible" when both can be satisfied, and "conflicting" when the satisfaction of the one is incompatible with that of the other. If two men are both candidates for the Presidency of the United States, one of them must be disappointed. But if two men both wish to become rich, the one by growing cotton and the other by manufacturing cotton cloth, there is no reason why both should not succeed. It is obvious that a world in which the aims of different individuals or groups are compossible is likely to be happier than one in which they are conflicting. It follows that it should be part of a wise social system to encourage compossible purposes, and discourage conflicting ones, by means of education and social systems designed to this end.

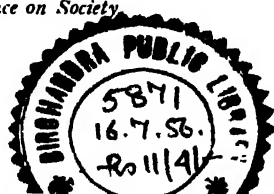
The central group of facts of which a political theory must take account is concerned with the character of social groups. There are various ways in which groups may differ. Among these, the most important are: cause of cohesion, purpose, size, intensity of the control of the group over the individual, and form of government. This leads to the question of power and its concentration or diffusion, which is perhaps the most

important in the whole theory of politics. The difficulty of the question arises from the fact that there are technical reasons for concentrating power, but that those who have power are almost sure to abuse it. Democracy is an attempt to solve this problem, but is not always a successful attempt. I have considered this group of questions in my book *Power: a new social analysis*.<sup>1</sup>

A number of problems of great complexity arise from the impact of new techniques upon a society whose organization and habits of thought are adapted to an older system.<sup>2</sup> There have been two great revolutions in human history which came about in this way. The first was the introduction of agriculture; the second, that of scientific industrialism. In each case the technical advance was a cause of vast human misery. Agriculture introduced serfdom, human sacrifice, the subjection of women, and the despotic empires which succeeded each other from the first Egyptian dynasty to the fall of Rome. The evils resulting from the intrusion of scientific technique are, it is to be feared, only just beginning. The greatest of them is the intensification of war, but there are many others. Exhaustion of natural resources, destruction of individual initiative by governments, control over men's minds by central organs of education and propaganda, are some of the major evils which appear to be on the increase as a result of the impact of science upon minds suited by tradition to an earlier kind of world. Modern science and technique have enhanced the powers of rulers, and have made it possible, as never before, to create whole societies on a plan conceived in some man's head. This possibility has led to an intoxication with love of system, and, in this intoxication, the elementary claims of the individual are forgotten. To find a way of doing justice to these claims is one of the major problems of our time. I have considered this part of political theory in Part III of *The Scientific Outlook*, and in *Authority and the Individual*.

<sup>1</sup> London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

<sup>2</sup> See my *Impact of Science on Society*.





## INTRODUCTION

The world in which we find ourselves is one where great hopes and appalling fears are equally justified by the possibilities. The fears are very generally felt, and are tending to produce a world of listless gloom. The hopes, since they involve imagination and courage, are less vivid in most men's minds. It is only because they are not vivid that they seem utopian. Only a kind of mental laziness stands in the way. If this can be overcome, mankind has a new happiness within its grasp.



**PART ONE**  
**ETHICS**



## CHAPTER I

# *Sources of Ethical Beliefs and Feelings*

ETHICS differs from science in the fact that its fundamental data are feelings and emotions, not percepts. This is to be understood strictly; that is to say, the data are the feelings and emotions themselves, not the fact that we have them. The fact that we have them is a scientific fact like another, and we become aware of it by perception, in the usual scientific way. But an ethical judgment does not state a fact; it states, though often in a disguised form, some hope or fear, some desire or aversion, some love or hate. It should be enunciated in the optative or imperative mood, not in the indicative. The Bible says "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself", and a modern man, oppressed with the spectacle of international discord, may say "would that all men loved one another"; these are pure ethical sentences, which clearly cannot be proved or disproved merely by amassing facts.

That feelings are relevant to ethics is easily seen by considering the hypothesis of a purely material universe, consisting of matter without sentience. Such a universe would be neither good nor bad, and nothing in it would be right or wrong. When, in Genesis, God "saw that it was good" before He had created life, we must suppose that the goodness depended either upon His emotions in contemplating His work, or upon the fitness of the inanimate world as an environment for sentient beings. If the sun were about to collide with another star, and the earth were about to be reduced to gas, we should judge the forthcoming cataclysm to be bad if we considered the existence of the

human race good; but a similar cataclysm in a region without life would be merely interesting. Thus ethics is bound up with life, not as a physical process to be studied by the biochemist, but as made up of happiness and sorrow, hope and fear, and the other cognate pairs of opposites that make us prefer one sort of world to another.

But when the fundamental ethical importance of feeling and desire has been admitted, it still remains a question whether there is such a thing as ethical *knowledge*. "Thou shalt not kill" is imperative, but "murder is wicked" seems to be indicative, and to state something true or false. "Would that all men were happy" is optative, but "happiness is good" has the same grammatical form as "Socrates is mortal". Is this grammatical form misleading, or is there truth and falsehood in ethics as in science? If I say that Nero was a bad man, am I giving information, as I should be if I said that he was a Roman Emperor, or would what I say be more accurately expressed by the words: "Nero? Oh fie!"? This question is not an easy one, and I do not think that any simple answer is possible.

There is another closely related question, and that is as to the subjectivity of ethical judgments. If I say that oysters are good, and you say they are nasty, we both understand that we are merely expressing our personal tastes, and that there is nothing to argue about. But when Nazis say that it is good to torture Jews, and we say that it is bad, we do not *feel* as if we were merely expressing a difference of taste; we are even willing to fight and die for our opinion, which we should not do to enforce our view about oysters. Whatever arguments may be advanced to show that the two cases are analogous, most people will remain convinced that there is a difference somewhere, though it may be difficult to say exactly what it is. I think this feeling, though not decisive, deserves respect, and should make us reluctant to accept at all readily the view that all ethical judgments are wholly subjective.

It may be said that if hopes and desires are fundamental in

ethics, then everything in ethics must be subjective, since hopes and desires are so. But this argument is less conclusive than it sounds. The data of science are individual percepts, and these are far more subjective than common sense supposes; nevertheless, upon this basis the imposing edifice of impersonal science has been built up. This depends upon the fact that there are certain respects in which the percepts of the majority agree, and that the divergent percepts of the colour-blind and the victims of hallucinations can be ignored. It may be that there is some similar way of arriving at objectivity in ethics; if so, since it must involve appeal to the majority, it will take us from personal ethics into the sphere of politics, which is, in fact, very difficult to separate from ethics.

The separation of ethics from theology is more difficult than the analogous separation in the case of science. It is true that science has only emancipated itself after a long struggle. Until the latter half of the seventeenth century, it was commonly held that a man who did not believe in witchcraft must be an atheist, and there are still people who condemn evolution on theological grounds, but very many theologians now agree that nothing in science can shake the foundations of religious belief. In ethics the situation is different. Many traditional ethical concepts are difficult to interpret, and many traditional ethical beliefs are hard to justify, except on the assumption that there is a God or a World Spirit or at least an immanent cosmic Purpose. I do not say that these interpretations and justifications are *impossible* without a theological basis, but I do say that without such a basis they lose persuasive force and the power of psychological compulsion.

It has always been one of the favourite arguments of the orthodox that without religion men would become wicked. The nineteenth-century British freethinkers, from Bentham to Henry Sidgwick, vehemently repudiated this argument, and their repudiation gained force from the fact that they were among the most virtuous men that have ever existed. But in the

modern world, which has been shocked by the excesses of totalitarians who professed themselves unbelievers, the virtues of Victorian agnostics seem less conclusive, and may even be attributed to imperfect emancipation from the Christian tradition. The whole question whether ethics, in any socially adequate form, can be independent of theology, must therefore be re-examined, with more awareness of the deep possibilities of evil than was to be found among our grandfathers, who were kept cozy by their comfortable belief in rational progress.

Ethical beliefs, throughout recorded history, have had two very different sources, one political, the other concerned with personal religious and moral convictions. In the Old Testament the two appear quite separately, one as the Law, the other as the Prophets. In the middle ages there was the same kind of distinction between the official morality inculcated by the hierarchy and the personal holiness that was taught and practised by the great mystics. In our own day the same duality persists. When Kropotkin, after the Russian Revolution, was able to return from his long exile, it was not the Russia of his dreams that he found being born. He had dreamed of a loosely knit community of free and self-respecting individuals, but what was being created was a powerful centralized State, in which the individual was regarded merely as a means. This duality of personal and civic morality is one of which any adequate ethical theory must take account. Without civic morality communities perish; without personal morality their survival has no value. Therefore civic and personal morality are equally necessary to a good world.

In all known human communities, even the most primitive, ethical beliefs and feelings exist. Some actions are praised, others are blamed; some are rewarded, others are punished. Some acts of individuals are thought to bring prosperity, not only to the individuals, but to the community; others are thought to bring disaster. The beliefs concerned are in part defensible on rational grounds, but in primitive communities



there is a preponderance of purely superstitious beliefs, which often inspire, at first, even those prohibitions which, later, are found to be capable of a reasoned justification.

One of the chief sources of primitive morality is tabu. Certain objects, especially those belonging to the chief, are imbued with *mana*, and if you touch them you will die. Certain things are dedicated to a Spirit, and must only be used by the medicine man. Some foods are lawful, others unlawful. Some individuals, until purified, are unclean; this applies especially to such as have some taint of blood, not only those who have committed homicide, but also women in childbirth and during menstruation (see Leviticus xv, 19-29). There are often elaborate rules of exogamy, making a large proportion of the tribe tabu to the opposite sex. All these tabus, if infringed, are liable to bring disaster upon the guilty, and indeed upon the whole community unless appropriate purificatory ceremonies are performed.

There is no pretence of justice, as we understand it, in the punishment following an act forbidden by a tabu, which is rather to be conceived as analogous to death as the result of touching a live wire. When David was transporting the Ark on a cart, it jolted over a rough threshing floor, and Uzzah, who was in charge, thinking it would fall, stretched up his hand to steady it. For this impiety, in spite of his laudable motive, he was struck dead (II Samuel, vi, 6-7). The same lack of justice appears in the fact that not only murder, but accidental homicide, calls for ritual purification.

Forms of morality based on tabu linger on into civilized communities to a greater extent than some people realize. Pythagoras forbade beans, and Empedocles thought it wicked to munch laurel leaves. Hindus shudder at the thought of eating beef; Mohammedans and orthodox Jews regard the flesh of the pig as unclean. St. Augustine, the missionary to Britain, wrote to Pope Gregory the Great to know whether married people might come to church if they had had intercourse the

previous night, and the Pope ruled that they might only do so after a ceremonial washing. There was a law in Connecticut—I believe it is still formally unrepealed—making it illegal for a man to kiss his wife on Sunday. In 1916 a clergyman from Scotland wrote a letter to the Press attributing our lack of success against the Germans to the fact that the Government had encouraged the planting of potatoes on Sundays. All these opinions can only be justified on a basis of tabu.

One of the best examples of tabu is the prevalence of laws or rules prohibiting various forms of endogamy. Sometimes a tribe is divided into a number of groups, and a man must take his wife from a group other than his own. In the Greek Church, godparents of the same child may not marry. In England, until recently, a man might not marry his deceased wife's sister. Such prohibitions are impossible to justify on the ground that the forbidden unions would do any harm; they are defended solely on the ground of ancient tabu. But further, those forms of incest which most of us still regard as not to be legally sanctioned are viewed, by most people, with a horror which is out of proportion to the harm that they would do, and which must be regarded as an effect of pre-rational tabu. Defoe's *Moll Flanders* is far from exemplary, and commits many crimes without a qualm; but when she finds that she has inadvertently married her brother she is appalled, and can no longer endure him as a husband although they had lived happily together for years. This is fiction, but it is certainly true to life.

Tabu has certain great advantages as a source of moral behaviour. It is psychologically far more compelling than any merely rational rules; compare, for instance, the shuddering aversion from incest with the calm reprobation of such a crime as forgery, which is not viewed superstitiously because savages cannot commit it. Moreover a tabu morality can be perfectly precise and perfectly definite. True, it may prohibit completely harmless acts such as eating beans, but it probably also prohibits genuinely harmful acts such as murder, and does so

more successfully than any other ethical method open to primitive communities. It is useful also in promoting governmental stability.

There's such divinity doth hedge a king,  
That treason can but peep the thing it would,  
Acts little of his will.

Since the assassination of a king usually leads to civil war, this "divinity" must be considered a beneficial effect of the tabus surrounding the Chief.

When the orthodox argue that rejection of theological dogmas must lead to a decay of morals, the strongest consideration on their side is the usefulness of tabu. When men cease to feel a superstitious reverence for ancient and venerable precepts, they may not be content with marrying their deceased wives' sisters and planting potatoes on Sundays; they may advance to even more heinous sins, such as murder, treachery, and treason. This happened in classical Greece and in Renaissance Italy, both of which, in consequence, suffered political disaster. In each case men whose grandfathers had been pious and orderly citizens became anarchic criminals under the influence of free thought. I do not wish to underestimate the weight of such considerations, more particularly in the present day, when dictatorships are largely an almost inevitable reaction against the diffused anarchic tendencies of men who have thrown off tabu morality without acquiring any other.

The arguments against reliance on tabu morality are, however, to my mind, considerably stronger than those in favour, and as I am engaged in the attempt to expound a rational ethic I must set forth these arguments in order to justify my purpose.

The first argument is that, in a modern educated and scientific society, it is difficult to preserve respect for what is merely traditional except by a tight control over education designed to destroy capacity for independent thought. If you are brought up as a Protestant, you must be kept from noticing that Saturday, not Sunday, is the day on which it is wicked to plant

potatoes. If you are brought up as a Catholic, you must remain ignorant of the fact that, in spite of the indissolubility of marriage, Dukes and Duchesses can have their marriages annulled by the Church on evidence which would not be thought adequate for an obscure couple. The necessary degree of stupidity is socially harmful, and can only be secured by means of a rigidly obscurantist régime.

The second argument is that, if moral education has been confined to the inculcation of tabus, the man who throws over one tabu is likely to throw over all the rest. If you have been taught that all the Ten Commandments are equally binding, and you then come to the conclusion that work on the sabbath is not wicked, you may decide that murder also is permissible, and that there is no reason why any one act should be thought worse than any other. The general moral collapse which often follows a sudden irruption of free thought is attributable to the absence of a rational basis for the traditional ethical code. There was no such collapse among freethinkers in nineteenth-century England, largely because they believed that utilitarianism afforded a non-theological ground for obedience to those moral precepts which it recognized as valid, which were in fact all those that contributed to the welfare of the community.

The third argument is that, in every tabu morality that has hitherto existed, there have been some precepts that were positively harmful, sometimes in a high degree. Consider, for example, the text: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exodus xxii, 18). As a result of this text, in Germany alone, some 100,000 witches were put to death during the century from 1450 to 1550. Belief in witchcraft was peculiarly prevalent in Scotland, and was encouraged in England by James I. It was to flatter him that "Macbeth" was written, and the witches are part of the flattery. Sir Thomas Browne maintained that those who deny witchcraft are a sort of atheists. It was not Christian charity, but the spread of the scientific outlook, that,

from about the time of Newton, put an end to the burning of harmless women for imaginary crimes. The tabu elements in conventional morality are less fierce in our day than they were 300 years ago, but they are still in part obstacles to humane feeling and practice, for example in the opposition to birth control and euthanasia.

As men begin to grow civilized, they cease to be satisfied with mere tabus, and substitute divine commands and prohibitions. The Decalogue begins: "God spake these words and said". Throughout the Books of the Law it is the Lord who speaks. To do what God forbids is wicked, and will also be punished; it would still be wicked even if it were not punished. Thus the essence of morality becomes obedience. The fundamental obedience is to the will of God, but there are many derivative forms which owe their sanction to the fact that social inequalities have been divinely instituted. Subjects must obey the king, slaves their master, wives their husbands, and children their parents. The king owes obedience only to God, but if he fails in this he or his people will be punished. When David took a census, the Lord, who disliked statistics, sent a plague, of which many thousands of the children of Israel died (1 Chron. xxi). This shows how important it was for everybody that the king should be virtuous. The power of priests depended partly upon the fact that they could to some extent keep the king from sin, at any rate from the grosser sins such as worship of false gods.

Obedience as the fundamental precept of ethics works fairly well in a stable community where no one questions the established religion and the government is tolerable. But at various times these conditions have failed. In the opinion of the Prophets they failed when kings were idolaters; in the opinion of the early Church they failed when rulers were pagan or Arian. They failed on a large scale at the Reformation, when no duty of allegiance was acknowledged by Protestants to Catholic sovereigns or by Catholics to Protestant sovereigns. But

Protestants were faced with greater difficulties than those that beset Catholics, for Catholics still had the Church, whose ethical teaching was infallible, whereas Protestants had no official source of moral precepts in countries where the government opposed them. There was, of course, the Bible, but on some subjects the Bible was silent and on others it spoke with a divided voice. Was it lawful to lend money at interest? No answer was to be found in the Scriptures. Should a childless widow marry her deceased husband's brother? Leviticus says no, Deuteronomy says yes (Lev. xx, 21; Deut. xxv, 5).

Protestants were thus led to revive an opinion already to be found in the Prophets and the New Testament, to the effect that God instructs each man's conscience as to what is right and what is wrong. There is therefore no need of an external ethical authority; nay, more, it is sin to obey such an authority when its behests go against the individual conscience. No precept enjoining obedience to an earthly authority is absolute, or can be binding except in so far as conscience approves it. This doctrine has had a profound effect in transforming ethics and politics, even among those who by no means accept it. It has afforded a justification for religious toleration, revolution against bad governments, refusal of social inferiors to submit to their "betters", equality of women, and the decay of parental authority. But it has failed disastrously to supply a new moral basis for social coherence in place of the old basis which it has destroyed. Conscience, *per se*, is an anarchic force upon which no system of government can be built.

There has been from the first a quite different source of ethical feeling and ethical precept, namely give-and-take, or social compromise. This is not dependent, like the kinds of morality that we have been considering hitherto, either upon superstition or upon religion; it arises, broadly speaking, from the desire for a quiet life. When I want potatoes, I might go by night and dig up those of my neighbour, but he might retaliate by stealing the fruit off my apple trees. Each of us

would then have to keep somebody on the watch all night to guard against such depredations. This would be inconvenient and tiresome; in the end, we should find it less trouble to respect each other's property—always supposing that neither of us was dying of starvation. A morality of this sort, though it may in early stages be helped by tabus or religious sanctions, can survive their decay, since, at least in intention, it offers advantages to every one. With the progress of civilization, it has come to play a larger and larger part in legislation, government, and private morality, and yet it has never succeeded in inspiring the intense emotions of horror or veneration that are connected with religion or tabu.

Man is a gregarious animal, not, like the ants and bees, by instinct, but in the main from a more or less obscure sense of collective self-interest. The largest social unit that has a firm instinctive basis is the family, and the family has begun to be undermined by the State since the State has come to consider it a duty to preserve the lives of infants neglected by their parents. Ants and bees, one must suppose, act on impulse in doing what is for the good of the nest or the hive, and never reflect that they might better themselves as individuals by anti-social behaviour. But human beings are not so fortunate. To cause their actions to be in accordance with the public interest, vast forces of law, of religion, and of education in enlightened self-interest, have had to be called into play, and their success has been very limited. It may be presumed that the earliest communities were enlarged families, but the main source of all further social cohesion has been war. In war a large community may be expected to defeat a small one, and therefore any method of generating social cohesion in a large group is biologically advantageous.

In so far as war has been the motive force tending to increase social cohesion, morality has had to consist of two very different parts, duties towards members of one's own herd, and duties having reference to individuals or groups outside the herd.

Religions aiming at universality, such as Buddhism and Christianity, have sought to obliterate this distinction, and to treat all mankind as one single herd. This point of view began, in the West, with the Stoics, as a consequence of Alexander's conquests. But hitherto, in spite of all that religion could do, it has remained an aspiration of a few philosophers and saints.

It is only morality within the herd that I wish to consider at present, and this only in so far as its purpose is to facilitate social co-operation. It is obvious that what is most imperative is some method, other than individual force, by which it can be decided what is to belong to whom. The two institutions by which most civilized communities have set to work to solve this problem are *law* and *property*, and the moral principle supposed to regulate these institutions has been *justice*, or what public opinion could accept as such.

Law consists essentially of a set of rules governing the use of force by the State, together with a prohibition of the use of force by private individuals or groups except in certain specified circumstances, such as self-defence. In the absence of law there is anarchy, involving the use of naked force by muscular individuals, and, although laws may be bad, they can seldom be so bad as to be worse than anarchy. A sentiment of respect for law is therefore a rational one.

Private property is a device by means of which submission to law is rendered less unpalatable than it would otherwise be. Originally, when primitive communism broke down, a man had a right to the produce of his own labour and to the dwelling and plot of land where he had always lived; moreover it appeared natural and right that he should be permitted to leave his property to his children. In a nomadic community his property would consist mainly of flocks and herds.

Where law and property exist, "theft" becomes a definable concept, and can be included in the Decalogue as one among the ten worst sins.

Laws are held to be good when they are "just", but "justice"



is a concept which it is very difficult to make precise. Plato's *Republic* professes to be an attempt to define it, but it cannot be said that the attempt is very successful. Under the influence of democratic sentiment modern men tend to identify justice with equality, but even now there are limits to this view. If it were proposed that the Queen should have the same income as a bricklayer, most people, including bricklayers, would think the proposal shocking. Until recent times, this feeling in favour of inequality had a much wider scope. I think that in fact "justice" must be defined as "what most people think just", or rather, to avoid the vicious circle, "that system which gives the least commonly recognized ground of complaint". To give concrete content to this definition, we must take account of the traditions and sentiments of the community to which it is to be applied. What remains the same for every community is that the "just" system is the one that causes the smallest amount of discontent.

It is clear that ethics considered as a matter of give-and-take is scarcely distinguishable from politics. In this it differs from the more personal ethic which consists in obedience to the will of God or submission to the voice of conscience. One of the problems that an ethical theory must consider is the relation of these two kinds of moral system, and the delimitation of their respective spheres. Consider the kind of sentiment that makes an artist prefer to do good work rather than potboilers; this must be allowed an ethical value although it has nothing to do with justice. For such reasons, I do not think that ethics can be *wholly* social. Each of the sources of ethical feeling that we have been considering, however crude in its beginnings, is capable of development into forms that can influence highly civilized men. If we ignore any one of them, the resulting ethic will be partial and inadequate.

## CHAPTER II

### *Moral Codes*

IN every community, even the crew of a pirate ship, there are acts that are enjoined and acts that are forbidden, acts that are applauded and acts that are reprobated. A pirate must show courage in attack and justice in the distribution of the spoils; if he fails in these respects, he is not a "good" pirate. When a man belongs to a larger community, the scope of his duties and possible sins becomes greater, and the considerations involved become more complex, but there is still a code to which he must conform on pain of public obloquy. Most acts, it is true, are considered morally indifferent, provided a man is not a slave or in a semi-servile condition. A man of independent means may get up when he likes and go to bed when he likes; he may eat and drink whatever he chooses, provided he avoids excess; he may marry the lady of his choice if she is willing. But he must perform his military duty when called upon by the State to do so, and he must abstain from crime, as well as from kinds of behaviour that make a man unpopular. Men without independent means have much less freedom.

Moral codes have differed in different times and places to an almost incredible extent. The Aztecs considered it their painful duty to eat the flesh of enemies on ceremonial occasions; it was held that if they neglected to perform this service to the State the light of the sun would go out. The head-hunters of Borneo, before the Dutch government deprived them of the right of self-determination, could not marry until they brought a dowry of a certain number of heads; any young man who failed incurred the contempt which, in America, is bestowed upon a "sissy". Confucius laid it down that a man whose parents are living is

guilty of a lack of filial piety if he refuses a lucrative government post, since the salary and perquisites should be devoted to making his father and mother comfortable in their old age. Hammurabi decreed that if the daughter of a gentleman dies as a result of being struck when pregnant, the daughter of the striker should be killed. The Jewish law laid it down that a woman taken in adultery should be stoned to death.

In view of this diversity of moral codes, we cannot say that acts of one kind are right or acts of another kind wrong, unless we have first found a way of deciding that some codes are better than others. The natural impulse of every untravelled person is to settle this question very simply: the code of his own community is the right one, and other codes, where they differ from his, are to be condemned. It is especially easy to maintain this position when one's own code is supposed to have a supernatural origin. This belief enabled the missionaries to hold that in Ceylon "only man is vile" and not to notice the "vileness" of British cotton manufacturers who grew rich on child labour and supported missions in the hope that "natives" would adopt cotton clothing. But when a number of divergent codes all claim an equally august origin, the philosopher can hardly accept any one unless it has some argument in its favour which the others lack.

It might be maintained that a man should obey the moral code of his own community whatever it may be. I should be inclined to concede that he cannot be blamed for doing so, but I think he should often be praised for not doing so. The practice of cannibalism was once almost universal, and in most cases it was connected with religion. It cannot be supposed that it died out of itself; there must have been moral pioneers who maintained that it was an evil practice. We read in the Bible that Samuel thought it wicked not to slaughter the cattle of conquered enemies, and that Saul, perhaps not from the noblest motives, opposed this view. Those who first advocated religious toleration were thought wicked, and so were the early opponents

of slavery. The Gospels tell how Christ opposed the stricter forms of the Sabbath tabu. It cannot, in view of such instances, be denied that some actions which we all think highly laudable consist in criticizing or infringing the moral code of one's own community. Of course this only applies to past ages or to foreigners; nothing of the sort could occur among ourselves, since our moral code is perfect.

"Right" and "wrong" are not on a level in the general estimation; "wrong" is more primitive, and remains the more emphatic conception. In order to be a "good" man it is only necessary to abstain from sin; nothing in the way of positive action is necessary. This, however, is not wholly the case even in the most negative view; you must, for instance, save a child from drowning if you can do so without too great risk. But this is not the sort of thing upon which most conventional moralists insist. Nine of the Ten Commandments are negative. If throughout your life you abstain from murder, theft, fornication, perjury, blasphemy, and disrespect towards your parents, your Church, and your King, you are conventionally held to deserve moral admiration even if you have never done a single kind or generous or useful action. This very inadequate notion of virtue is an outcome of tabu morality, and has done untold harm.

Traditional morality is too much concerned with the avoidance of "sin" and with the ritual of purification when "sin" has occurred. This point of view, though prevalent in Christian ethics, antedates Christianity; it existed among the Orphics, and an account of it is to be found at the beginning of Plato's *Republic*. "Sin", as it appears in the teaching of the Church, consists in acts of certain specified kinds, some socially harmful, some neutral, some positively useful (e.g. euthanasia under proper safeguards). Sins incur Divine punishment unless there is sincere penitence; if there is, they can be forgiven, even if it is impossible to undo any harm they may have caused. The sense of sin, and the fear of falling into sin, produce, where

they are strong, an introspective and self-centred frame of mind, which interferes with spontaneous affection and breadth of outlook, and is apt to generate a timorous and somewhat disagreeable kind of humility. It is not by such a state of mind that the best lives are inspired.

"Right", as opposed to "wrong", is originally a conception connected with power, and having to do with the initiative of those who are not bound to obedience. Kings should "do right in the sight of the Lord". There is something of the same kind of positive duty in the case of every kind of office or profession, and indeed of every position that gives power. Soldiers must fight, firemen must risk their lives in saving people from burning houses, lifeboatmen must put to sea in a storm, doctors must risk infection in an epidemic, fathers must do everything lawful to provide food for their children.

In this way each profession comes to have its own ethical code, in part different from that of ordinary citizens, and in the main more positive. Doctors are bound by the Hippocratic oath, soldiers by the laws of military discipline, priests by a number of rules from which other men are exempt. Kings must marry as the interests of the State direct, and not according to the promptings of their own inclinations. The positive duties belonging to each profession are in part prescribed by law, in part enforced by the opinion of the profession or of the general public.

It is possible for two contradictory ethical codes to be simultaneously accepted by the same community. The most remarkable example of this is the contrast between Christian morality, as taught by the Church, and the code of honour formulated in the age of chivalry and by no means extinct in our own day. The Church condemned homicide, except in war or by due process of law, but honour demanded that a gentleman should at all times be ready to fight a duel to avenge an insult. The Church condemns suicide, but a German naval commander is expected to commit suicide if he loses his ship. The Church

condemns adultery, but the code of honour, while not positively commanding it, nevertheless respected a man more when he had many amatory conquests to his credit, especially if the ladies concerned were high-born, and still more if he had slain their husbands in fair fight.

The code of honour is, of course, only binding upon "gentlemen", and in part only in their dealings with other "gentlemen". But where it is applicable it is utterly imperative, and is unhesitatingly obeyed at all costs. It is set forth in all its glorious absurdity in Corneille's "Cid". The father of the Cid has been insulted by the father of the Cid's lady, but is too old to fight himself; therefore honour demands that the Cid shall fight, though it means disaster to his love. After a soliloquy in the grand manner, he makes his decision:

Allons, mon bras, sauvons du moins l'honneur,  
Puisqu' après tout il faut perdre Cléopâtre.

The same code, now degenerate and laughable, appears in Tom Moore's first dealings with Byron. Moore began by challenging Byron to a duel, but before the matter came to a head he wrote again, saying he had remembered that he had a wife and children, whom his death would render destitute, and suggesting that they should make friends rather than fight. Byron, now quite secure, and afraid, as always, of being thought no gentleman, was very slow to accept Moore's apologies, and gave himself the appearance of a swashbuckling fire-eater. But in the end it was happily agreed that Moore should write his life instead of causing his death.

Although its manifestations were often absurd and sometimes tragic, belief in the importance of personal honour had important merits, and its decay is far from being an unmixed gain. It involved courage and truthfulness, unwillingness to betray a trust, and chivalry towards those who were weak without being social inferiors. If you wake up in the night and find that your house is on fire, it is clearly your duty, if you can,

## MORAL CODES

to wake sleepers before saving yourself; this is an obligation of honour. You will not be thought well of if you leave others to their fate on the ground that you are an important citizen while they are people of no account, though there are circumstances in which such a defence would have a kind of validity—for instance, if you were Winston Churchill in 1940. Another thing that honour forbids is abjectness in submission to unjust authority, for example in currying favour with an invading enemy. To come to smaller matters, betraying secrets and reading other people's letters are felt to be dishonourable actions. When the conception of honour is freed from aristocratic insolence and from proneness to violence, something remains which helps to preserve personal integrity and to promote mutual trust in social relations. I should not wish this legacy of the age of chivalry to be wholly lost to the world.

## CHAPTER III

### *Morality as a Means*

WE have considered, so far, two divergent views as to what constitutes morality. On one view it consists of conformity to the ethical code of the community to which we happen to belong; on the other it consists of obedience to the will of God or to the individual conscience. I have confined myself to expounding these views, without seriously examining what arguments can be adduced for or against them. Each has defects, which we must now consider.

Moral codes, as we have seen, differ in different societies; Bornean head-hunters and Quakers, for example, differ widely as to the sort of conduct that they advise. We may say: the virtuous man obeys the code of his own community. Or we may say: the virtuous man obeys the code of my community. Broadly speaking, in dealings with savages, administrators adopt the former view and missionaries the latter. But in some respects the administrators agree with the missionaries; for example, even the most tolerant of them try to extirpate cannibalism.

We all, in practice, hold that one moral code may be preferable to another. Throughout Western civilization there are very few who would approve the ancient Semitic custom of sacrificing children to Moloch, the Roman father's power of life and death over his children, the former Chinese practice of binding women's feet, or the Japanese rule that a wife must sleep on a wooden pillow while her husband sleeps on a soft one. I am not, at the moment, arguing that we are right in disapproving of these practices; it is not difficult to imagine eloquent defences of them by those to whom they seemed right. What I



am arguing is something as to which they and we would be in agreement, namely that one moral code may be better or worse than another. When this is admitted, it follows that there is something in ethics that is superior to moral codes, and that by means of this something they are to be judged. Ethics, therefore, is not exhausted in the single precept: "Do what your community approves, and avoid what it disapproves".

It remains possible, however, to say: "virtue, everywhere and always, consists in obedience to the moral code of *my* community". This is the view adopted by the Church. The early Christians considered it wicked of the pagans to practise idolatry, although the pagan moral code enjoined it. Modern missionaries are shocked by nudity, even where it has been the custom from time immemorial. By the help of scientific weapons of war this view has been caused to prevail throughout Africa and the South Sea islands. Only the Japanese found means of resisting this argument: when, in the sixteenth century, the Spaniards sent them missionaries and fire-arms, they at first admitted both, but when they had learnt to make fire-arms they decided to tolerate no more missionaries.

Missionaries may argue that the superiority of the Christian code is known by revelation. The philosopher, however, must observe that other religions make the same claim. An appeal to theology is against the rules in philosophy, which must follow the practice of Thomas Aquinas, who, in the first three of the four Books of his *Summa contra Gentiles*, deliberately abstains from every appeal to revelation. If, then, we are to prefer our own code of morals, we must, as philosophers, find reasons which should make a universal appeal, and not only an appeal to those who share our theology.

An ethic based upon the individual conscience has inadequacies very similar to those of an ethic based on moral codes. Individual consciences differ: conscientious objectors think it wrong to fight, thugs think it wrong to abstain from fighting; the Manicheans thought it wicked to eat any animal food

except fish, but many sects have considered this exception an abomination. The Dukhobors refused military service, but held it proper to dance naked all together round a camp fire; being persecuted for the former tenet in Russia, they emigrated to Canada, where they were persecuted for the latter. The Mormons had a divine revelation in favour of polygamy, but under pressure from the United States government they discovered that the revelation was not binding. Some moralists, including many eminent Jesuits, have considered tyrannicide a duty; others have taught that it is always a sin. Clearly conscience does not always declare the will of God, for if it did such diversities would be impossible.

Just as we all hold that some ethical codes are better than others, so we must hold that some consciences are better than others, unless we are so ignorant as not to be aware that consciences differ. There must therefore be some criterion other than conscience by which to decide what is to be considered desirable conduct, and this criterion cannot be derived from rules of conduct such as "do not kill" or "do not steal", because, as we have seen, there is no general agreement as to such rules.

Without going outside the limits of our own age and nation it is easy to show that exceptions to received rules would be generally admitted on reflection. Take, first, the prohibition of murder. If "murder" is defined as "unjustifiable homicide" it follows tautologically that murder is wrong. But this merely transfers the argument to the inquiry as to when homicide is unjustifiable. Most people think that homicide is justified in war and as a result of condemnation by due process of law. It is very generally held that you have a right to kill a man in self-defence if there is no other way of preserving your life. It would seem to follow that you must have a right to kill a man in defence of your wife or your children. But how about saving your wife from a fate worse than death? And how about other people's children when they are in danger? Or suppose you had come upon Guy Fawkes just about to fire the fatal train,

and the only way of stopping him had been to shoot him on the spot? Most people would consider you justified in shooting him. But suppose, when you saw him making a light, you were uncertain whether he meant to blow up King, Lords and Commons or only to smoke a pipe, would you be justified in taking the blacker view of his intentions?

Or take the prohibition of incest. Suppose atomic bombs had reduced the population of the world to one brother and sister; should they let the human race die out? I do not know the answer, but I do not think it can be in the affirmative merely on the ground that incest is wicked.

To such casuistical problems there is no end, and clearly the only way in which an answer is theoretically possible is to discover some end which conduct should serve, and to judge conduct to be "right" when it is calculated to promote this end.

We are thus led to "good" and "bad", rather than "right" and "wrong", as the fundamental concepts of ethics. In this view "right" conduct is conduct which is a means to "good". This view is associated with the utilitarians, who maintained that "right" conduct is "useful" conduct. They went on to assert that conduct is "useful" when it promotes the general happiness or pleasure, but for the moment I am not considering this further proposition; I am considering only the proposition that there is *some* purpose in terms of which "right" conduct is to be defined.

This point of view is obscurely present throughout the development of ethical rules, even when it is not explicitly recognized. Tabus must not be infringed because the results, if they are, will be unpleasant. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes are enforced by utilitarian arguments; "blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" does not present meekness as an end in itself. It is generally recognized that a good ruler will aim at the happiness of his people. And so on.

Even when ethics is conceived as consisting in obedience to moral rules known by revelation, it is still customary to defend

these rules by utilitarian arguments. If the *only* basis of morality is God's decrees, it follows that they might just as well have been the opposite of what they are; no reason except caprice could have prevented the omission of all the "nots" from the Decalogue. This view has been rightly condemned by the theologians. It is much easier to believe that God has prohibited murder than that He has enjoined it; sects like the Thugs, which consider murder a religious duty, remain very small. The real (though often unconscious) reason for this feeling is that a community addicted to murder is uncomfortable, and cannot realize various ends that most of us think good. Theologians have always taught that God's decrees are good, and that this is not a mere tautology; it follows that goodness is logically independent of God's decrees. God could not have enjoined murder, since such a decree would have had evil consequences.

It is interesting to observe that Thomas Aquinas defends the received rules of Christian morality by utilitarian considerations. For example: if marriage were not permanent, fathers would have no part in education; but fathers are useful, both because they are more rational than mothers, and because they have the physical strength needed for punishment; therefore marriage should be permanent. Or again: brothers and sisters ought not to marry, because, if the affection of brother and sister were joined to that of husband and wife, the total would be so great as to lead to an excess of passion. I am not examining the validity of these arguments; I am merely pointing out that they involve regarding virtue as a means to something other than itself, which may be called "the good".

The only moralists who have made a serious attempt to be consistent in regarding virtue as an end in itself are the Stoics and Kant. But even they showed in various ways that they had another ethic in addition to the one in which they explicitly believed.

The Emperor Marcus Aurelius was an orthodox Stoic, and in his philosophic capacity he believed virtue to be the only

thing that was good on its own account; moreover he taught, in common with his whole school, that the best opportunities for virtue occur in adversity. He himself had no occasion to tremble before a tyrant, but he followed Epictetus, who, as a slave, had been intimately subject to unjust power, and even (it is said) crippled as a result of cruel punishment. Epictetus taught that the virtuous will is the sole good, and that tyrants cannot compel you to be wicked; you have therefore no reason to fear them, but quite the contrary, since they confer the boon of occasions for courage and fortitude. Marcus Aurelius, therefore, when he had the chance, should have been a tyrant, and should have afforded his subjects the benefit of the sweet uses of adversity. Instead of this he took trouble over the supply of grain to Rome, and spent weary years fighting the barbarians on the Northern frontiers. Although, as a philosopher, he considered happiness a thing of no account, as an Emperor he toiled unceasingly to bring happiness to his Empire. Logically, such conduct was indefensible, though humanely it was highly laudable.

Kant was never tired of pouring scorn on the view that the good consists of pleasure, or of anything else except virtue. And virtue consists in acting as the moral law enjoins, *because* that is what the moral law enjoins. A right action done from any other motive cannot count as virtuous. If you are kind to your brother because you are fond of him, you have no merit; but if you can hardly stand him and are nevertheless kind to him because the moral law says you should be, then you are the sort of person that Kant thinks you ought to be. But in spite of the total worthlessness of pleasure Kant thinks it unjust that the good should suffer, and on this ground alone holds that there is a future life in which they enjoy eternal bliss. If he really believed what he thinks he believes, he would not regard heaven as a place where the good are happy, but as a place where they have never-ending opportunities of doing kindnesses to people whom they dislike.

Most of the cases in which there seems to be a belief that certain actions are right and others wrong independently of their consequences are traceable to the effects of tabus of which the sanctions have been forgotten or have come to seem incredible. Arguments against birth control are sometimes derived from the fate of Onan. If a like fate normally befell those who imitate his behaviour—which no doubt was at one time believed to be the case—that would afford an unanswerable utilitarian argument. But the horror inspired by a tabu action which is thought to bring punishment often survives belief in the punishment, and thus gives rise to a rule which can no longer be defended on utilitarian grounds. Children living near a power wire will be taught not to touch it, and will still fear to do so if the wire comes to be disused. This is analogous to the case of tabus that once had an apparently rational basis in superstitious beliefs that are now extinct. But such tabus, in general, tend to become gradually inoperative.

I conclude that we shall come nearer to an ethic which can command a large measure of general agreement if we take "good" and "bad" as our fundamental concepts than if we take "right" and "wrong". That is to say, we shall hold that certain things are "good" and certain others "bad"; that both these are matters of degree, for instance a severe pain is worse than a slight one; that "right" conduct is that which, on the evidence, is likely to produce the greatest balance of good over evil or the smallest balance of evil over good, a good and an evil being considered equal when a man is indifferent as to whether he experiences both or neither; and that the sum-total of moral obligation is contained in the precept that a man ought to do right in the above sense.

If this view is accepted, the next step must be to investigate what can be meant by "good" and "bad".

## CHAPTER IV

### *Good and Bad*

"GOOD" and "bad", "better" and "worse", are terms which may or may not have a verbal definition, but in any case first come to be understood ostensively. Let us then begin with an attempt to indicate their meaning, leaving the question of verbal definition to a later stage. A thing is "good", as I wish to use the term, if it is valued for its own sake, and not only for its effects. We take nasty medicines because we hope they will have desirable effects, but a gouty connoisseur drinks old wine for its own sake, in spite of possible disagreeable effects. The medicine is useful but not good, the wine is good but not useful. When we have to choose whether a certain state of affairs is to exist or not, we have of course to take account of its effects. But the state of affairs, as well as each of its effects, has an intrinsic quality which inclines us to choose it or not to choose it, as the case may be. It is this intrinsic quality that I call "good" when we incline to choose it and "bad" when we incline to reject it.

Utilitarians maintain that pleasure is the only good and pain the only evil. This may be questioned, but in any case most pleasure is "good" and most pain is "bad", in the sense in which I wish to use these words. A little consideration of pleasure and pain will help to bring out the difference between ends and means, which is important in this discussion.

We are in the habit of thinking some pleasures good and some bad; we think the pleasure derived from an act of benevolence is good, while that derived from cruelty is bad. But in so judging we are confusing ends and means. The pleasure of cruelty is bad as a means, because it involves pain for the

victim, but if it could exist without this correlation perhaps it would not be evil. We condemn the pleasure of the drunkard because of his wife and family and the headache next morning, but given an intoxicant which was cheap and caused no hang-over, the pleasure would be all to the good. Morality is so much concerned with means that it seems almost immoral to consider anything solely in relation to its intrinsic worth. But obviously nothing has any value as a means unless that to which it is a means has value on its own account. It follows that intrinsic value is logically prior to value as means.

This question of ends and means is of great ethical importance. The difference between a civilized man and a savage, between an adult and a child, between a man and an animal, consists largely in a difference as to the weight attached to ends and means in conduct. A civilized man insures his life, a savage does not; an adult brushes his teeth to prevent decay, a child does not except under compulsion; men labour in the fields to provide food for the winter, animals do not. Forethought, which involves doing unpleasant things now for the sake of pleasant things in the future, is one of the most essential marks of mental development. Since forethought is difficult and requires control of impulse, moralists stress its necessity, and lay more emphasis on the virtue of present sacrifice than on the pleasantness of the subsequent reward. You must do right because it is right, and not because it is the way to get to heaven. You must save because all sensible people do, and not because you will ultimately secure an income that will enable you to enjoy life. And so on.

But it is easy to carry this attitude of mind too far. It is pathetic to see an elderly rich business man, who from work and worry in youth has become dyspeptic, so that he can eat only dry toast and drink only water while his careless guests feast; the joys of wealth, which he had anticipated throughout long laborious years, elude him, and his only remaining pleasure is the use of financial power to compel his sons to



submit in their turn to a similarly futile drudgery. Preoccupation with means rather than ends has made marriage, in most civilized countries at most times, a matter of bargaining rather than of mutual attraction. Where it prevails in an extreme form it kills all joy of life, all artistic enjoyment and creativeness, and all spontaneous affection. Misers, whose absorption in means is pathological, are generally recognized to be unwise, but minor forms of the same malady are apt to receive undue commendation. Without some consciousness of ends, life becomes drab and dreary; in the end the need for excitement finds a worse outlet than it would otherwise have done, in war or cruelty or intrigue or some other destructive activity.

Let us consider for a moment the working out of this preoccupation with means in the economic system. Let us suppose, for the sake of concreteness, that you are concerned in the manufacture of tractors. If you are concerned as a capitalist, the sole purpose of the tractors is to increase your bank account, which, if you are prudent, you do not spend, but invest so as to increase your bank account still further. Whether the tractors will plough properly is irrelevant, except in so far as is needed to prevent your firm from getting a bad name. Pierpont Morgan the elder bought up old condemned rifles during the American Civil War, and sold them as new to the Army of the Mississippi; he devoted the proceeds of this and similar transactions to enabling the French to prolong a hopeless struggle after Sedan. Such was the prevalent ethic that he died universally respected. Similarly the manufacturer who has the skill to pass off bad tractors as good ones will win more respect than the man who relies upon the excellence of his product and contents himself with a small profit.

If you are an employee, you will be obsessed by the fear of unemployment, and will therefore come to regard work as an end in itself, not as a means to production. Any device by which a given number of tractors can be produced with less labour will rouse your hostility, since it creates a risk of your

losing your means of livelihood. In Genesis work is represented as a curse, to which Adam's sin condemned his posterity, but in the modern world it has come to seem a blessing, of which the amount must on no account be diminished.

If you are a purchaser of tractors, you are almost equally removed from ultimate ends. The tractors are to be used to produce food to enable men to work in producing food to enable men to work . . . and so on in an endless chain, in which the intrusion of any consideration of what is good on its own account would be felt by every sound economist or administrator to be a frivolous irrelevance.

This preoccupation with means is not confined to the realm of industrial production. Consider the teaching of mathematics. In universities, mathematics is taught mainly to men who are going to teach mathematics to men who are going to teach mathematics to . . . Sometimes, it is true, there is an escape from this treadmill. Archimedes used mathematics to kill Romans, Galileo to improve the Grand Duke of Tuscany's artillery, modern physicists (grown more ambitious) to exterminate the human race. It is usually on this account that the study of mathematics is commended to the general public as worthy of State support. This utilitarian attitude is, apparently, as prevalent in Soviet Russia as elsewhere. I met some twenty years ago a Russian professor of mathematics who told me that he had once ventured to suggest to his class that mathematics is not *only* to be valued for its power of improving machines, but this remark, so he said, was met by the whole class with pitying contempt as a lingering remnant of bourgeois ideology.

When we escape from the exclusive contemplation of means, the economic process, and the whole of human life, takes on a completely different aspect. We ask no longer: what have the producers produced, and what has consumption enabled the consumers in their turn to produce? We ask instead: what has there been in the lives of consumers and

producers to make them glad to be alive? What have they felt or known or done that could justify a benevolent Creator and refute the heresy of a wicked demiurge who created the world out of spite? Have they experienced the glory of new knowledge? Have they known love and friendship? Have they rejoiced in sunshine and the spring and the smell of flowers? Have they felt the joy of life that simple communities express in dance and song? Once in Los Angeles I was taken to see the Mexican colony—idle vagabonds, I was told, but to me they seemed to be enjoying more of what makes life a boon and not a curse than fell to the lot of my anxious hard-working hosts. When I tried to explain this feeling, however, I was met with a blank and total lack of comprehension.

But it is now time to end these discursive observations and address ourselves more closely to the matter in hand.

It is clear, I think, that if we had no desires we should never have thought of the antithesis of good and bad. We feel pain and wish to be rid of it; we feel pleasure and wish to prolong it. We are irked by restraints on our freedom, and glad when our movements are unrestrained. Food and drink and love, when they are lacking, are desired with passionate intensity. If we were indifferent to what happens to us, we should not believe in the dualisms of good and bad, right and wrong, praiseworthy and blameworthy, and we should have no difficulty in submitting to our fate, whatever it might be. In an inanimate world there would be nothing either good or bad. I infer that the definition of "good" must bring in desire. I suggest that an occurrence is "good" when it satisfies desire, or, more precisely, that we may define "good" as "satisfaction of desire". One occurrence is "better" than another if it satisfies more desires or a more intense desire. I do not pretend that this is the only possible definition of "good", but only that its consequences will be found more consonant with the ethical feelings of the majority of mankind than those of any other theoretically defensible definition.

When I define "good" as "satisfaction of desire", the definition implies that the satisfaction of one person's desire is as good as that of another person's, provided the two desires are of equal intensity. It follows that the good is not identical with what people seek in action, for in action each man seeks the satisfaction of his own desires, which usually differ from those of other people. When I say that each man seeks the satisfaction of his own desires, I am expressing a truism: all our acts, except those which are purely reflex, are inspired, of necessity, by our own desires. This does not mean that we are wholly egocentric in our actions, since we are not so in our desires. Most people desire the happiness of their children, many that of their friends, some that of their country, and a few that of all mankind. Life insurance shows to what an extent the wishes of ordinary men go beyond the scope of their own lives. But though my wishes may be unselfish, they must be mine if they are to affect my actions.

If "the good" is defined as "the satisfaction of desire", we may define "my good" as "the satisfaction of my desires". It then follows logically that in action I always seek my good. My good is a part of the good, but not necessarily the greatest part that could be realized by a person in my situation. Suppose I am a small boy who has been secretly given twelve chocolates, and I have eleven companions who have been given none. I may have such limited desires that I surreptitiously eat all the twelve myself, in which case each gives me less satisfaction than the one before, and the last perhaps hardly any. Or I may be so filled with benevolence that I give one to each of my companions, and eat only one myself. In that case, each chocolate gives as much satisfaction as the first one gave in the other case, and the total of satisfaction is greater than in the other case. Therefore the benevolent boy causes more of the good to exist than is caused by the selfish boy. This illustrates how some desires minister more to the general good than other desires do.

It may be said that we *ought* to seek the general good, and not only our own good. I do not deny this, but I must maintain that it requires a good deal of elucidation before it acquires a definite meaning. The word "ought" may be replaced by the word "right", and we may consider the statement: "Right" conduct is conduct which promotes the general good. I am prepared to accept this as a definition, but if it is to have any practical importance it must be supplemented by methods of inducing me to do what is right. I shall not do the right act in any given circumstances unless I desire to do it, and therefore the problem is one of influencing my desires. This may be done in many ways. The criminal law may cause a partial harmony between my interest and the general interest. I may desire praise and fear blame, which may lead me to act in a way that will be applauded. I may, by a wise upbringing or a fortunate heredity, have acquired a generous nature, which makes me spontaneously desire the good of others. Or I may, like Kant, feel an impulse towards rectitude for its own sake. All these are ways of inducing me to do what is right, but all operate by influencing my desires.

If mankind were agreed as to what is "right", we could take "right" as the fundamental concept in ethics, and define "the good" as what is achieved by right conduct. But as we have seen, there is a very wide divergence between different communities as to what they consider right or wrong. In general, particularly in the case of tabu morality, this divergence is traceable to a difference in beliefs as to the effects of actions, and there is much less diversity as to what results of actions are thought desirable. It is this fact that makes it better to define "right" in terms of "good" rather than vice versa.

Nevertheless, the statement that it is right to pursue the general good, though it may be set up as a verbal definition of the word "right", is something more than this, at any rate in its implications. It means, or implies, that acts promoting the general good are those that will be praised by the community,

or at least that the general good is promoted if they are praised. It means, or implies, that it is to every one's interest that every one else's acts should be of this kind. It implies that there is more good, i.e. more satisfaction of desire, in a community if social pressure, whether through the law or through praise and blame, is applied to induce right action in the above sense than if it is applied in any other way. For all these reasons, the statement that right conduct is that which promotes the general satisfaction of desire is one which has a more than verbal importance.

Against our definition of "good" as "satisfaction of desire" an objection might be raised on the ground that some desires are evil and their satisfaction is a further evil. The most obvious example is cruelty. Suppose A desires that B should suffer, and succeeds in satisfying his desire; is this good? Clearly the whole state of affairs is not good, and our definition does not imply that it is good. B's desires are not satisfied, and no more are those of normal people who have no animus against B. A's satisfaction is a source of dissatisfaction to others, and A's desire that B should suffer is one which most people will desire not to exist, unless B is a person who has incurred the hatred of the community. But if one could imagine A's satisfaction in isolation, would it still be evil? Suppose, for instance, that A were a lunatic filled with insane hatred of B, and confined in an asylum. It might be thought desirable to let him believe that B was suffering, and on the whole the state of affairs would be better if he had this belief than if he were driven into paroxysms of rage by the thought of B's prosperity. It is only in such exceptional circumstances that a desire which runs counter to the general interest can be satisfied in isolation; but when it can, the satisfaction supplies its modest quota to the sum-total of good. I do not think, therefore, that there is any reason to regard some satisfactions as bad, so long as they are considered in isolation, without regard to their concomitants and consequences.

But when desires are considered as means the matter is quite otherwise. Some pairs of desires are compatible, some incompatible. If a man and woman desire to marry each other, both can be satisfied; but if two men desire to marry the same woman, one at least must be disappointed. If two partners both desire the prosperity of their firm, both can achieve the result; but if two rivals each desire to be richer than the other, one of them must fail. What applies to two desires applies equally to groups of desires. Borrowing a term from Leibniz, I call a number of desires "compossible" when all can be satisfied by the same state of affairs; when they are not compossible, I call them incompatible. When a nation is at war, the desires of all its citizens for victory are mutually compossible, but they are incompatible with the opposite desires of the enemy. The desires of those who feel benevolently to each other are compossible, but those who feel reciprocal malevolence have desires that are incompatible.

It is obvious that there can be a greater total of satisfaction of desire where desires are compossible than where they are incompatible. Therefore, according to our definition of the good, compossible desires are preferable as means. It follows that love is preferable to hate, co-operation to competition, peace to war, and so on (Of course there are exceptions; I am only stating what is likely to be true in most cases.) This leads to an ethic by which desires may be distinguished as right or wrong, or, speaking loosely, as good and bad. Right desires will be those that are capable of being compossible with as many other desires as possible; wrong desires will be those that can only be satisfied by thwarting other desires. But this is a large theme, and I will leave its development for a later chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### *Partial and General Goods*

IN the last chapter we defined the good as satisfaction of desire. The general good will be the total of satisfaction of desire, no matter by whom enjoyed. The good of a section of mankind will be the satisfaction of the desires of that section, and the good of an individual will be the satisfaction of the desires of that individual. It is obvious that the various partial goods may conflict: when two men compete in a Presidential election, one of them will fail to have his desire satisfied, and so, in a lesser degree, will the percentage of the electorate that voted for him. As this illustration shows, it is possible for the desires of individuals or groups to conflict without any culpability on either side. Conflicts of desire are an essential and inescapable fact of human life. One of the main purposes of law and morality is to mitigate them, but they can never be wholly abolished.

There are various systems of morality, which take differing views as to the class whose good an individual should seek. These systems all co-exist, and many individuals hold sometimes one, sometimes another. Each of them is embodied in familiar maxims.

Christ taught that a man should pursue the general good. This is the purport of the precept "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself", together with the explanatory parable of the Good Samaritan, showing that a member of a group usually regarded with hostility is to be considered a neighbour. The same view was taken by the Buddhists, and by the Stoics (*humani nihil a me alienum puto*).

Since the rise of nationalism, it has been common to substitute the good of one's own nation for that of all mankind as the



proper aim of a virtuous man's endeavours. This view is embodied in such maxims as "for king and country", "my country, right or wrong", "Deutschland über alles",<sup>1</sup> etc. I knew some Russian revolutionaries during the Russo-Japanese war who drank a toast "to the failure of Russian arms"; it gave me a shock, although with my reason I agreed with them. During the recent war, many British patriots had difficulty in approving of anti-Nazi Germans who desired the defeat of Hitler. Until the inauguration of the League of Nations, it was taken as axiomatic that a country's foreign policy should take account only of its own interests. Since that date, though the practice has remained unchanged, there has been some modification of the theory. When we sing the National Anthem, we no longer permit ourselves to proclaim with gusto the lines wishing ill to foreigners:

Frustrate their knavish tricks,  
Confound their politics,  
And make them fall.

But many of us still cherish the same sentiments in our hearts.

Some men give their loyalty, not so much to their country, as to their colour: white, black, brown, yellow, as the case may be. I am told that at Port au Prince, in Haiti, there are statues of Christ and Satan: Christ is black, and Satan is white. This strikes white men as odd, but the opposite practice of Christian art everywhere else appears to them entirely natural. Kipling proclaimed white supremacy with his doctrine of "lesser breeds without the law". The Chinese believed in yellow supremacy till 1840, and the Japanese till 1945. All these points of view involved the belief that only the good of one race is important.

Another section to which some hold that loyalty should be confined is one's own class. The King, in his palmy days, took

<sup>1</sup> The first of these maxims expresses the noble idealism of the British, the third shows the moral depravity of the Germans. Otherwise there is no difference between them.

for his motto: "God and my right"; at that time, subjects had no rights. When the aristocracy governed, Lord John Manners stated their claims in the immortal lines:

Let laws and learning, art and manners, die,  
But God preserve our old nobility.

As champion of the wage-earners, Marx retorted with his slogan: "Proletarians of all countries, unite."

There are those who go further still in limiting loyalty. Confucius very nearly confined it to the family; some theorists and multitudes of practical men have confined it to the Self, and have embodied their philosophy in the proverb "charity begins at home".

Each of these doctrines expresses something of the prevalent desires of large groups of men, and could not otherwise have achieved wide-spread popularity. I wish to consider whether there is anything of a theoretical kind to be said in favour of any one of them as against any other.

Let us begin with egoism, by which I mean the doctrine that every man does—or should—pursue exclusively his own interest. To make this doctrine precise, we must first define what we mean by a man's "interest". The most precise definition is that of the doctrine called "psychological hedonism", which asserts that every man not only does, but inevitably must, pursue exclusively his own pleasure. This doctrine was held by all the earlier utilitarians. It followed that, if "virtue" consists in pursuing the general good, the only way to make men virtuous is to produce a harmony between general and private interests, by insuring that the act which will produce the maximum of pleasure for myself is also that which will produce the maximum of pleasure for the community. In the absence of the criminal law I should steal, but fear of prison keeps me honest. If I enjoy being praised and dislike being blamed, the moral sentiments of my neighbours have an effect

similar to that of the criminal law. Belief in everlasting rewards and punishments in the next life should, on a rational computation, be an even more efficient safeguard of virtue.

But it is not the case that men desire only their own pleasure. There is a confusion arising from the fact that, whatever you may desire, you will obtain pleasure from achieving your object, but in most cases the desire is the source of the pleasure, whereas psychological hedonism supposes the anticipated pleasure to be the cause of the desire. This applies especially to the simplest desires, such as hunger. The hungry man desires food, whereas the well-fed gourmet desires the pleasure to be derived from food. The desire for food is one which we share with the animals, whereas the desire for the pleasure of good food is a sophisticated product of cookery, memory, and imagination.

Further, the pleasure to be derived from achieving a desired object consists, in general, of two parts, one that of achievement, the other that belonging to the object on its own account. If you chase round the town in search of oranges, and at last obtain some, you have not only the pleasure that the oranges would have given you if you had obtained them without difficulty, but also the pleasure of success. Only the latter is *always* present when a desire is satisfied; the former may, on occasion, be absent.

The psychological hedonist is thus mistaken in supposing that what we desire is always pleasure: but he is mistaken also in another respect which is, for us, of even more importance.

What a man desires need not be an experience of his own, or a series of experiences, or anything to be realized in his own life. It is not only possible, but usual, to have objects of desire which lie wholly outside our own lives. The most common example of this is parental feeling. A large percentage of mankind, probably a majority, desire that their children shall prosper after they themselves are dead. The same thing is true of wives, and of some women who are not wives; Charles II,

in dying, hoped that Nell Gwyn would not be allowed to starve. The man whose desires are limited within the circle of his own experiences will find, as he grows older and his future becomes more circumscribed, that life grows continually narrower and less interesting, until nothing remains but to sit by the fire and keep warm. On the other hand, the man whose desires have a large scope outside his own life may retain to the end the zest of earlier years; the Platonic Socrates, while he is dying, is as anxious as before to spread what he considers the true philosophy. Some men desire not only the welfare of their family and their friends, but of their nation, and even of all mankind. In some degree this is normal; there are few men whose last hours of life would not be rendered more unhappy if they could know that within a hundred years atomic bombs would extinguish human life.

What is true in psychological hedonism is that *my* desires inevitably determine *my* behaviour. What is false is (1) that my desires are always for my pleasure, (2) that my desires are limited to what is going to happen to me. Not all desires are egoistic, and the belief that they are has caused needless difficulties for a whole school of ethical philosophers. There is no limit to the remoteness of what a man may desire, though a desire will not influence action unless there is thought to be some means of achieving it. You may wish that Hannibal had won the Second Punic War, or hope that there is life in some of the remoter nebulae, but there is nothing that you can do about it, and therefore such desires are without practical importance.

Desires which are not egocentric are almost as likely as selfish desires to conflict with those of others. Suppose, for example—to take an instance which is by no means far-fetched—that one group of mankind wishes all the world to be communist, while another group wishes all the world to be Catholic. If, in such a case, there is to be any method except a trial of strength, it can only be by finding some other desire in which

the two groups are at one—say the desire to avoid war. If there is no such common desire, co-operation is impossible, and neither group can rise from its own good to a conception of the general good that both sides can acknowledge. This problem is not a purely theoretical one; it is a problem upon whose solution depends the possibility of eliminating war and establishing an international government. But if we are to examine it dispassionately, it will be wise to state it in the most abstract and theoretical manner that is possible, which I shall now proceed to do to the best of my ability.

When a man's desires are limited, in the main though perhaps not completely, to the interests of some one group, such as his own nation, race, class, or sex, there are three different ethical attitudes that he may adopt. First, he may say that the interests of mankind are, in the long run, identical with those of his group, although members of other groups, in their selfish blindness, are unable to see this. Second: he may say that his group alone counts in the realm of ends, and that the rest are to be regarded as mere means towards satisfying the desires of his own group. Third: he may hold that, while *he* should only take account of the interests of group A, to which he belongs, a man belonging to group B should similarly take account only of the interests of group B. Each of these views has important adherents, and each deserves to be considered.

The first view, which may be called that of enlightened imperialism, presupposes a doctrine that some state of society are better than others, even if large groups of mankind do not think so. Those who adopt this view will say that it is better to be civilized than savage, or Christian than pagan, or monogamous than polygamous, or industrious than lazy, or what not. The Greeks considered their way of life better than that of the barbarians, and after Alexander this belief took an imperialistic form. Antiochus vainly endeavoured to make the Jews eat pork and take to athletics, but in general, throughout the Near East,

the Greek way of life commended itself to the conquered populations, at any rate in the cities. The Romans inherited this Hellenistic outlook in their successful civilizing of the West. Later, Christians and Mohammedans took a similar view of the importance of their respective religions. The British in India regarded themselves unquestioningly as a civilizing influence: Macaulay had no doubt that it was our beneficent mission to bring our literature, our law, and our philosophy to the help of the backward nation for which Providence had made us responsible.

The most elaborate theoretical justification for theories of this kind is to be found in Hegel and Marx. In Hegel there is a World Spirit or a World Conductor who presides over the development of civilization, and uses different nations successively as its instruments. At one time it divided its attentions between Mesopotamia and the banks of the Nile; then it migrated to Greece, to Rome, and, for the past 1,400 years, to Germany. At some unspecified but distant date it will cross the Atlantic and settle in the United States. At each stage the nation which is, for the time, the vehicle of the World Spirit is justified in being imperialistic, and will succeed in its enterprises until its era comes to an end; nations that resist it, as Carthage resisted Rome, are blind to their subordinate place in the cosmic scheme, and are doomed to inevitable defeat.

Marx adopted this philosophy of history, with only two slight modifications. He changed the name of the World Conductor to "Dialectical Materialism", and he substituted classes for nations. At one time the feudal aristocracy were the vehicle of progress; at the French Revolution this role passed to the bourgeoisie; at the Communist Revolution (which turned out to be not that of 1848) it was to pass to the proletariat. The Communist Revolution having now taken place in Russia, Russian imperialism has become justified equally on Marxist and on Hegelian principles.

I come now to the second type of theory, according to which "the good" is something limited to a certain group, the rest of mankind being either obstacles to be swept away or means to be utilized to the best advantage of those who alone have importance as ends. Most people, quite unreflectingly, take up this attitude towards animals: lions and tigers are obstacles, sheep and cows are useful means, but neither in the one case nor in the other do we seriously consider their welfare as part of the general good at which a wise statesman should aim. It is true that in modern times humanitarians have protested, with a certain measure of success, against cruelty to animals; nevertheless fox-hunting continues. Moreover the Church has always taught, and still teaches, that man has no duties towards the lower animals; on this ground Pope Pius IX regarded the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals as ethically heretical, and forbade the establishment of a branch in Rome. In spite of the humanitarians, we may still say that most people, in most countries, regard animals merely as means or obstacles.

Where human beings are concerned, religion, more especially the Christian religion, wholly repudiates this view. In Christian theory, a man has no right to murder one of his slaves, or to force a female slave into concubinage, or to dissolve the marriages of slaves; in religious matters, all men are equal. But although this is the official doctrine, it has been very far from being the practice in most Christian countries at most times. Wherever slavery has prevailed, the above theoretical rights of slaves have not been acknowledged either by individuals or by the law courts. Most white men in North America formerly regarded Negroes as useful, Indians as a nuisance, but in neither case did they consider the good of the Indian or the Negro as having any bearing on what the white man should do. This attitude has been very greatly softened during the last hundred years, but more of it still lingers than is generally admitted.

The same sort of things are to be said about child labour in the early days of British industrialism, about forced labour and concentration camps in Germany and Russia, and about the Nazi treatment of Jews.

The best theoretical exponent of this ethic in modern times has been Nietzsche. He held that there are certain great men, or heroes, whose thoughts and emotions are important, but that the mass of mankind are to be considered solely as means or obstacles to the florescence of the superior few. The French Revolution, he says, was justified because it produced Napoleon. There is a difficulty in giving precision to this doctrine, since there is no precise definition of the "hero"; in practice, he is just someone whom Nietzsche admires. It is much easier to give precision to the doctrine in its more popular forms, as man versus woman, white men versus coloured men, capitalists versus wage-earners, gentiles versus Jews, etc. But in theory Nietzsche's doctrine could be made precise; it could be said, for instance, that the only men who "count" are those with an intelligence quotient of 180 and upwards. It is to be expected that men with an intelligence quotient of 179 would wish the doctrine slightly modified, but perhaps a government of the super-intelligent would find ways of dealing with them.

The third theory, of those mentioned above, is that every man's duty is confined to his own group, so that, while A should take account only of one section of mankind, B, who does not belong to this section, should only take account of another. This opinion has had few supporters among theoretical writers on ethics, but it is widely held in practice. A great many people hold that duty to one's country should override duty to mankind. If a German U-boat Commander, from disapproval of the Nazis, had caused his vessel to fall into the hands of the British, few British naval officers would have approved his action, however glad they might have been that it had taken place. In China, until recently, there was a similar



attitude about duty to one's family, which was held to be more imperative than duty to the State, and to justify actions obviously contrary to the public interest. In some degree most people would have some sympathy with this point of view; we should judge leniently a man who had obeyed the orders of the Nazis for fear lest they should torture his children.

As a matter of theory, this point of view demands a separation of "right" from "good". However "good" may be defined, "right" conduct will no longer be that likely to produce the maximum of good in general, but that likely to produce the maximum of good to a certain group of which the agent is a member. The ethical consequences will be different according to the kind of group that is chosen, e.g. family, nation, class, or creed. No good ground can be given for choosing one way of dividing mankind into groups rather than another. Nor is it easy to invent any plausible reason for ignoring the good of people outside one's own group and conceding a reciprocal liberty on their part. For this theory does not contend, like our first and second theories, that our own group is superior to the others; it is a polite theory, although its consequences in practice are just the same as if it were not. On the whole, it has less plausibility than the other two, and I doubt if it is held with equal sincerity outside the ranks of officers of the armed services of civilized countries.

The theories that we have been considering are among those that deny, or seem to deny, that right conduct is that most likely to promote the general good. The first, which we called that of enlightened imperialism, does not really make this denial; it says that, when the future is taken into account, there is one group (to which, by good fortune the person proclaiming the doctrine happens to belong) whose desires, when satisfied, will bring more satisfaction to future generations than those of any other group. This doctrine, when it is true in fact, justifies its adherents in considering that in pursuing their own aims they are pursuing the general good. On such grounds one may

justify Alexander's conquest of the East and Caesar's conquest of Gaul; perhaps also the white man's expulsion of the Indian from most of the territory of the United States. The whole question, in this case, is one of fact, not of theory, and since it is theory that concerns us we need say no more on this subject.

The second theory, which we may call that of the superman, may be capable of a similar explanation. It may be said that the superman's desires and pleasures and pains are so immeasurably more intense than those of ordinary men that they contribute more to the total than those of millions of the "bungled and botched", as Nietzsche calls them. But this contention is not very plausible. Shakespeare says:

The poor beetle that we tread upon  
In corporal sufferance feels a pang as great  
As when a giant dies.

Without going so far as this, we cannot well maintain that Napoleon's joys and sorrows exceeded the sum of all the joys and sorrows of the millions who lived through the French Revolution or perished while it was in progress. But if we do not maintain something of this sort, we are faced by the logical impossibility of defining the class of supermen. In practice, vanity and conceit furnish the definition: I am, of course, a superman, and I must admit enough people of approximately equal merit to give the group a chance of surviving the indignation and ridicule of the rest. But this is not a theory; it is merely a myth generated by megalomania.

The third theory, according to which each man should concern himself exclusively with his own group, has a certain measure of practical wisdom. I can probably do more for my own family than for some family in Central Africa, and therefore Mrs. Jellaby was misguided. But as the world grows more interconnected the scope of such considerations becomes more and more limited. When the world's food supply is inadequate, if I am part of the public that refuses to consider the needs of

other countries I am helping to bring a slow and painful death to millions. The doctrine is not logically respectable except in the extreme form of egoism, and in this form, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, it is not true to human nature.

I conclude that, so far, we have found no definable partial good which it is rational to substitute for the general good as the right end of action. But this raises the question of moral obligation, which will be considered in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER VI

### *Moral Obligation*

IN this chapter I wish to discuss the concept involved when I say: "I *ought* to do so-and-so", or "I have a *moral obligation* to do so-and-so", or "such-and-such an act is *morally right*". So far, I have been content to say that the "right" act is that most likely to promote the general good; but this, though I believe it to be true, may be not a definition, but a highly debatable proposition. If you ask "what ought I to do?" and I reply "you ought to do what will probably promote the general good", I am not telling you the *meaning* of your question, which you feel that you already know. Your situation is analogous to that of a child who asks "what is bread made of?" and is told "bread is made of flour". The child is already familiar with bread, and is not asking for a verbal definition of the word "bread"; the answer, therefore, increases his culinary rather than his linguistic knowledge. So it is if I say you ought to pursue the general good: this statement, true or false, is a proposition of ethics, not a verbal proposition such as we have a right to expect from the dictionary.

There are in fact a number of ethical systems, which differ as to what I ought to do. One man may say: you ought to obey the will of God. Another may say: you ought to aim at the maximum of pleasure for mankind. Yet another may say: you ought to seek self-realization, or glory, or the victory of your country. But although all these people give different answers as to what I ought to do, they all attach the same meaning to the word "ought", for, if they did not, their disagreement would be only as to words, and would have little practical importance. It is this common meaning underlying ethical disagreements that I am now concerned to examine.

Many ethical writers maintain that "ought" is an ultimate and unanalysable concept, of which no verbal definition is possible. That is to say, it, or some equivalent, must be part of the minimum vocabulary<sup>1</sup> of ethics; perhaps it may even be the only indefinable ethical term. Other writers have offered various definitions. Finally, it might be maintained that there is no such concept, that "you ought to do this" must be interpreted as "I approve of your doing this" (where approval is a specific emotion), and that the pretence of objectivity in my statement is a fraudulent endeavour to give legislative authority to my own wishes. Is there any way of deciding between these different views?

Some might maintain that *obedience* is what is essential to the concept of moral obligation. This view no longer commands as much assent as it did in former times, when it was regarded as unquestionable that children should obey their parents, wives should obey their husbands, subjects should obey the king, and the king should obey the will of God. But as we have already seen, it is heretical, and very properly so, to hold that right and wrong are *constituted* by God's decrees, since in that case they might just as well have been the opposite of what they are. It is always right to obey God's decrees because God always wills what is right, not because the opposite would be right if He willed it; when we say that God's decrees are right, we are not uttering a mere tautology. We cannot therefore *define* "right" as "obeying God's will", even though we may hold that obedience to God's will is always right. Obedience to any human will is not likely to be always right; kings, husbands, and fathers may on occasion command what is wicked. For these reasons, it seems impossible to define moral obligation in terms of obedience, even when the whole of traditional theology is accepted as valid.

There are similar objections to defining "ought" in terms of approval. We feel emotions of approval or disapproval, which

<sup>1</sup> On minimum vocabularies see *Human Knowledge*, Part IV, Chap. II.

are often very strong, and when we disapprove we say "he ought not to have done that". If all men agreed as to what should be approved and what disapproved, we might possibly use these sentiments to define moral obligation. But, as we have seen, different ages and different regions differ profoundly as to what they approve or disapprove, and even in one country at one time there are disagreements, for instance between vivisectors and anti-vivisectors, and between conscientious objectors and the rest of the population. If, then, approval is to be used in defining moral obligation, we shall have to decide *whose* approval. Three possible answers suggest themselves: first, that of constituted authority; second, that of my conscience; third, that of the agent's conscience. Constituted authority will not do, since it is possible for it to command what is wrong, and my conscience will not do, since I have clearly no right to declare myself a moral dictator. It remains to examine the third view, that what a man ought to do is what his own conscience approves.

According to this theory, there are a pair of opposite emotions which may be called "moral approval" and "moral disapproval" respectively; when a man feels the former towards a contemplated act, he will be right if he performs it, and when the latter he will be wrong. Or we may take the more emphatic view that an inner voice says "do this" or "do not do that", whenever the agent chooses to listen for it. The daimon to which Socrates trusted was of this sort, except that it only gave negative commands: it forbade wrong actions, but did not enjoin right ones. There is no important difference between the two forms of the theory, which take "approval" as an emotion, or as an inner voice. I shall discuss the former, but just the same considerations are applicable to the latter.

It should be observed, to begin with, that the differences between different men's consciences afford no argument against this theory. The Quaker and the head-hunter each do right in following his own conscience, the Quaker in not killing when

the Government says he should, and the head-hunter in killing when the Government says he should not. The theory has no need of an objective "good" that right action should tend to realize, since "right" action is defined, not by its effects, but by its cause, which must be the voice of conscience.

Although, on this theory, a man always does right in obeying his conscience, there is no reason why another man should not wish that his conscience told him something different. A's conscience may urge him to try to alter the dictates of B's conscience, for example if A is the European administrator of a cannibal district and B is a cannibal. In such circumstances consciences are very easily altered, as appears from the fact that cannibalism is almost extinct. But such changes, if our present theory is right, must be effected entirely by non-rational means, since no valid argument is conceivable by which it could be shown that one sort of conscience is morally superior to another. It is no use to prove to a man that an act which he regards as right will have unpleasant consequences, for he may say: "what of that? Morality has nothing to do with pleasure". Of course if he allows himself an argument, you may be able to produce a counter-argument; if, for example, he appeals to Scripture, you may be able to prove that the passage in question has been mistranslated. But so long as he abstains from giving any reason beyond his own conscience he is logically impregnable.

I do not think this theory can be refuted, in the sense of being shown to involve some logical absurdity, but I think it can be proved to have consequences which hardly any one would accept. The most glaringly paradoxical of these consequences is that there can be no ethical reason for preferring one man's conscience to another's. There can of course be non-ethical reasons: if I am a beggar, I shall prefer a conscience that enjoins charity to one that holds it wicked to encourage idleness, and if I am a statesman I shall prefer an opponent whose conscience approves of compromise to one who views

every question as a matter of principle. But I cannot say that the type of man I prefer is a better man, for every man who follows his conscience is morally perfect. I cannot say that the conscience of a man who is both civilized and humane is better than that of a savage whose outlook is bounded by hunting and war. I cannot admit that a man's conscience is worsened when it becomes blunted by persistent evil doing, so that in the end it no longer protests against his habitual sins. This has the shocking consequence that long-continued sin makes virtue easier, since it diminishes the number of things that conscience forbids. All these paradoxes follow if every man's conscience is the ultimate arbiter of what is right for him.

Let us consider for a moment what are the causes that in fact determine a man's opinions as to what is right. The most important, in the great majority of cases, is moral education in childhood, consisting, in the main, of expressions of disapproval, possibly varied by approval on rare occasions. The disapproval may be merely verbal, or may involve definite punishment; in either case, the child concludes that conduct of a certain sort is blamed, by parents certainly, by neighbours probably, and by God if the child is piously brought up. The association with blame may die down in adult life, and there then remains only a disagreeable feeling connected with acts of the kind in question. This disagreeable feeling may appear as an emotion of disapproval. Of course moral education of this kind is not confined to childhood; boys and young men acquire readily the moral sentiments of their social milieu, whatever these sentiments may be. The boy who has been taught at home that it is wicked to swear, easily loses this belief when he finds that the schoolfellows whom he most admires are addicted to blasphemy.

I do not think, however, that conscience can be *wholly* resolved into an effect, conscious or unconscious, of the praise and blame that a man has experienced. There are moral pioneers, who refuse to blame something habitually blamed, or to praise something habitually praised. Praise and blame



themselves have not grown up out of nothing, but have been generated from moral feelings, or at any rate from feelings of which some are moral.

Consider the extreme of praise, namely fame. Men become famous in many different ways, the commonest being the possession of some rare skill. Shakespeare, Napoleon, film stars, and great athletes can do things that other people would like to do but cannot. In rivals this is a ground of envy, but in those who are too humble to be rivals it is a ground of admiration: Huygens and Leibniz were delighted by the rumour that Newton had gone mad, but Pope, who did not aspire to scientific eminence, could praise Newton sincerely up to the limits of his deserts. Praise for skill, however, is not moral praise. Though Socrates thought otherwise, modern moralists hold that no skill and no knowledge are required for virtuous action—a view which is suggested in the New Testament. There are, however, men and women who are officially famous for their virtue; they are the Saints. A Saint, it is true, must have other merits in addition to those that are moral; he must, for instance, work miracles after he is dead. But for our purposes we may ignore these other merits; the residue will show what the consensus of Western mankind has held to be the greatest proof of pre-eminent virtue.

Confining our attention to the more famous among the Saints (for some, like the excellent St. Gubby, have only local celebrity), we find that a very large proportion owe their position to their activities in spreading the Faith. Some have done this by their writings, like the Evangelists, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas; others have done it as missionaries, like St. Thomas the Apostle, St. Boniface, and St. Francis Xavier; a third group, like King Louis IX, distinguished themselves in war against the infidel; a fourth were noted as organizers of persecution, like St. Cyril and St. Dominic. Above all there is the Noble Army of Martyrs—men who died rather than renounce the Catholic Faith, for to die on behalf of

any other faith is no credit to the victim. It is possible to achieve saintship by notable benevolence, for instance in almsgiving, but this alone does not, as a rule, lead to great fame.

It would seem that the moral qualities which are most actively admired are courage and self-sacrifice on behalf of one's own group. Some men admire these qualities wherever they occur; others only admire them when displayed by members of their own herd. The Inquisition did not admire the courage of the heretic martyrs whom it condemned, but regarded their stubbornness as inspired by the Devil. In war, some men admire bravery on the part of the enemy, others do not. There is a broad rule about praise, that it is bestowed upon those who have sacrificed their own interests (or what seemed such) to the interests of others. The desire for praise and the fear of blame may be so great that they outweigh all other considerations: "death rather than dishonour" is considered a desirable sentiment, but is not, strictly speaking, an unselfish one. The same sort of thing operates in less dramatic forms: if I were tempted to try to defraud a railway company by travelling without a ticket, the fear of disgrace in the event of discovery would be a far more powerful deterrent than the legal penalty. In this way praise and blame supplement the criminal law in causing individual interests to harmonize with those of the community.

But although praise and blame are useful, they would be less useful than they are if utility were their conscious basis. Certain kinds of acts, which may in fact be useful, are admired independently of their utility, and are admired most when they are not done from a desire for praise; others, on the other hand, are blamed independently of their disutility. There are other emotions, in addition to love of praise and fear of blame, which prompt acts such as are praised; a man may forgo his own advantage from affection or benevolence or truthfulness, or even from sheer combativeness. Generals who die in the moment of victory, like Epaminondas and Wolfe, are supposed

to die happy, because desire for victory is stronger than desire for life.

"Conscience", to which we must now return, may, I think, be defined as praise and blame directed towards oneself in respect of some contemplated act. In most people this is a reflection of the praise and blame that will be bestowed by their community, but in some, owing to emotional or intellectual peculiarities, it has a more individual quality. A man who has an exceptional dislike to the infliction of pain may become an anti-vivisectionist and an opponent of capital punishment. A man who has an exceptional respect for the Gospels may refuse to take an oath. Mormons think it wicked to smoke, because their sacred book forbids the use of tobacco. Tolstoy and Gandhi, in later life, considered sex wicked even in marriage; I do not know their exact reasons, but I suspect them of being similar to those set forth for a slightly different thesis by St. Augustine in the *City of God*. In such ways a man's standards of praise and blame may differ from those of his neighbours, and if he is a "conscientious" man he will follow his own standards rather than theirs.

We may perhaps distinguish "subjective" and "objective" rightness, saying that a man's conduct has "subjective" rightness when it is what his own conscience approves, but that this does not insure "objective" rightness. In that case, the question "what ought I to do?" is ambiguous. If "ought" is taken in the sense of subjective rightness, I ought to follow my conscience, but if in the sense of objective rightness (which remains to be defined), my action will have to satisfy some less personal test before it can be approved. If we admit, as I think we must, that not all consciences are perfect, we shall be compelled to seek for a concept of "objective rightness" by which consciences can be judged.

I think myself that "objective rightness" is a concept not capable of precision, but definable, in so far as it is definable, in terms of the desires of persons other than the agent, or rather

of many persons of whom the agent is only one. The main purpose of morals is to promote behaviour serving the interests of the group, and not merely of the individual. I think that the "objectively right" act is that which best serves the interest of the group that is regarded as ethically dominant. The difficulty is that this group will be differently defined by different people and in different circumstances. It may be the family, the firm, the nation, the Church, or mankind as a whole; it may even be larger than mankind, and include all sentient beings. Which of these groups is chosen to define "objective rightness" will depend upon what is the collection of human beings that is making the definition. At a French "conseil de famille" it will be the family; at a shareholders' meeting, the firm; at a court martial, the nation; at a trial of a priest for indiscipline, the Church. At the trials of war criminals, it is nominally the interests of mankind that dominate. In laws regulating vivisection, the animals must, by a fiction, be supposed to be capable of stating their case.

Is there any theoretical ground for preferring one of these groups to another as the basis for the definition of "objective rightness"? I do not see that there is. In a former chapter I defined "right" by reference to the satisfaction of desire in general, that is to say, by taking account of all sentient beings. But I do not know how, by any purely logical argument, to refute a man who maintains that only the desires of Germans should be considered. This view has been refuted on the battlefield, but can it be refuted in the study? When I say that it has been refuted on the battlefield, am I admitting that if Germany had been victorious the view would have been valid? I am naturally reluctant to say this, and I do not believe it, so let us see what there is to be said on the other side.

If the concept of "objective rightness" is to serve any purpose, it must satisfy two conditions, one theoretical and the other practical. The theoretical condition is that there must be some way of knowing what kinds of acts are "objectively

right"; the practical condition is that, at least for some people, the fact that an act is recognized as objectively right must be a motive prompting its performance.

Let us first take the view that "objectively right" is indefinable. In that case, if anything is to be known about it, there must be at least one indemonstrable proposition about it, the truth of which will have to be recognized by an ethical intuition. I may say that I have such an intuition telling me that the objectively right act is that which probably does most to promote the general good. If everybody agreed with me, this theory might be acceptable. It is, in any case, not logically refutable. You cannot prove that there is no such concept, or that I do not know what I say I know about it. But equally I cannot prove that you are mistaken if you say that the objectively right act is that which promotes your good, or that of Germans, or that of white men. I shall, if I argue, be compelled to resort to vulgar abuse. I can say: "Sir, you are misusing terms. Ethical intuition is a noble faculty, of which you are evidently destitute. It is a faculty which teaches disinterestedness, which requires you to get outside Self and view the world with God-like impartiality. It is in the sphere of action what the scientific outlook is in the sphere of thought. But as for you, you are earth-bound you are fettered to the accidents of your birth, you are a grovelling wretch incapable of emancipation from bondage to the *here and now*."

I can make this speech, with such embellishments as my rhetorical skill may suggest, but will it carry conviction to my interlocutor? It may do if he already has a profound respect for me, or if he is a schoolboy exposed for years to my subtle propaganda. But if he is a Nazi and I am his prisoner, he will merely subject me to torture and semi-starvation until I admit that he has the best of the argument. For this I may hate and despise him, but I cannot refute him. It might seem, then, that the whole disagreement is in the sphere of feeling and passion, not in that of theoretical truth and falsehood.

It may be said that I am conceding more than I need. There may be such a faculty as ethical intuition, and I may possess it, but there may be many men who are destitute of it. H. G. Wells's story, "The Country of the Blind", relates the efforts of a man with normal eyesight to persuade a blind population that he possesses a sense of which they are destitute; he fails, and in the end they decide to put out his eyes to cure him of his delusion. So it may be with ethical intuition, but if most men are ethically blind the fate of those who have ethical vision is likely to resemble that of Wells's seer. Indeed the history of moral reformers bears out this view.

Let us ask: what does, in psychological fact, determine what a man will think objectively right? Primarily moral rules learnt in youth, such as those constituting the Decalogue. But if he is a reflective person, inclined to ethical and political philosophy, he will seek for some unifying principle from which moral rules can be deduced. He will realize that, if his principle is to make a wide appeal, he must not choose a principle which gives a special position to himself or to some group to which he belongs, unless he believes himself or his group strong enough to achieve world domination. We all believe this domination possible as regards men *versus* animals. We know that we can, on the whole, make animals behave in a way that furthers our interests: sheep and cattle yield wool and milk and flesh, tigers roar behind bars for the amusement of children instead of eating us when they feel so disposed. Black men were similarly regarded so long as the slave trade persisted. Objective rightness is, as these instances show, habitually defined with reference only to a dominant group, so long as its dominance is unquestioned. But when it is not, our ethical philosopher must widen his outlook if he hopes that his doctrine will win general assent.

There are, as we have seen, two ways in which moral rules can be made general. One is to define the general good, and to say that all men ought to pursue it. The other is to define the

private good of an individual or group, and to say that each individual ought to pursue his own good or that of his group. The view that each individual ought to pursue the good of his group (as opposed to his own good) is that which must be held by those who make patriotism or family loyalty the supreme duty. To this view, as we have seen, there are objections derived from the fact that there is no discoverable reason for preferring one of the groups to which a man belongs to another: family, nation, class, creed, all have claims, and there is no argument proving that ethical predominance should be given to any one of them.

We are thus left with two views as to what is objectively right. We may say: "It is objectively right for each man to pursue his own good"; or we may say: "It is objectively right to pursue the general good". Here we are still treating "objectively right" as something indefinable, and are assuming the possibility of deciding between the above two propositions, not by a definition, but by argument or ethical intuition.

Let us first take the egoistic alternative, and let us not forget that we defined "good" as "satisfaction of desire". I may be so benevolent that I desire the general good more than I desire anything else: in that case, my good and the general good coincide, and our two precepts lead to identical results. Or, again, it may be that, though my strongest desires have reference to myself, they are such as to prompt only acts conducive to the general good; this may happen, for example, if my strongest desire is that I should be a benevolent person or that I should be "married to immortal verse". Moral systems that are egoistic in the sense with which we are at present concerned need not be selfish in the ordinary sense. The Stoics, for instance, held that each man should seek his own virtue, but they held that in so doing he would promote the general good. They did not, however, define "good" as "satisfaction of desire"; only certain desires had objects that were good. If you desired riches or power or any kind of worldly prosperity,

you were desiring what was worthless; only virtue was truly good, and only virtue would be desired by the virtuous man. And virtue consisted in conformity with the will of God.

We must therefore examine the possibility of dividing desires into good, bad, and indifferent. We have already seen that such a division is possible when "good" is defined as "satisfaction of desire", since some kinds of desires are compossible and others are not. But a division made in this way is derivative, and considers desires only as means. The Stoic ethic requires that we should consider some desires intrinsically bad and others intrinsically good, or rather that we should consider acts inspired by certain desires intrinsically wrong and acts inspired by certain others intrinsically right. E.g. we might say: Acts inspired by hate are wrong and acts inspired by love are right. We are supposing this view to be held, not because of the consequences of such acts, but because of their intrinsic quality; and we are supposing it to be held in virtue of an ethical intuition.

My objection to this view would be that, in fact, we prefer love to hate because it leads to a greater total satisfaction of desire, and that, when tabu and superstition are discarded, what remains in the way of rules apparently derived from ethical intuition is completely deducible from the one principle that it is objectively right to pursue the general good, and that this one principle may, therefore, be accepted as a substitute for many subordinate intuitions.

This, however, does not dispose of the view that, in deciding what is objectively right, certain desires are more relevant than others. Psychologically, I am bound to pursue my own good, that is to say, I shall always act from desire, and the desire is necessarily mine. When we confront the two propositions: (1) I shall pursue my own good, (2) I ought to pursue the general good; it is clear that the second proposition has no practical importance unless there are ways of causing me to desire the general good, or at least to act in ways that promote



it. The latter is a question of harmony between public and private interests; it is promoted (or should be) by the criminal law, the economic system, and the bestowal of praise and blame. But if I desire the general good on its own account, that produces a harmony between my good and the general good independently of the social system; it may therefore be called a "good" desire. And generally, those desires that, by their intrinsic nature and not only in virtue of the social system, cause me to act for the general good, may be called "good" desires, or perhaps better "right" desires. Such desires, accordingly, deserve more moral respect than those that run counter to the general interests of the community.

When, in the endeavour to formulate an ethical philosophy, we ask ourselves what kinds of acts are objectively right, we shall, whether we know it or not, be influenced by our desires, but probably not by all of them, or at any rate not by all of them equally. We shall realize that *general* rules are what we are seeking, and that the aims of moral action in general must contain no special reference to ourselves. That every man should pursue his own interest is a logically possible view, but that everybody should pursue Mr. A's interest would be a preposterous theory, unless Mr. A were an absolute monarch or an incarnate Buddha or something of the kind, in which case the general rule could be enunciated without mentioning Mr. A by name. "We all ought to serve the King" is a maxim that might be accepted in the armed services; but if A is the king, it would be misleading to say "We all ought to serve A", because A might abdicate, and our duty would then be to his successor. We have thus a first principle as to rules of objective rightness: it must be possible to enunciate them without mentioning any individual.

We might, without infringing this rule, make distinctions among different classes of individuals. The commonest distinction, in ethical philosophy, would be between virtuous men and sinners. Many theologians have held that justice is a good

*per se*, and that, on this account, the good will inherit eternal bliss while the wicked will suffer eternal torture. In this terrestrial life, it is our duty—so these theologians have held—to imitate the Divine decrees as far as we can, by conferring rewards upon the good and punishments upon the wicked—punishments of which the purpose is not wholly deterrent or reformatory, but in part purely retributive. This view is much less common now than in former times: most men, now-a-days, regard the criminal law as having the prevention of crime for its purpose, and the belief in hell has been abandoned or grown dim. But it remains a logically possible view that we ought to love some kinds of men and hate other kinds, in the absolute sense that the satisfaction of the desires of those whom we are to hate is to be reckoned an evil, and the thwarting of their desires is to be reckoned a good. What is there to be said against this view?

There is, to begin with, a prudential argument, which, however, is inadequate and somewhat superficial. It may be urged that hate generates hate, and that a world in which hate is encouraged will be so full of strife that nobody will be able to enjoy a good life. This contention is inadequate if the class of men to be hated is small and powerless, for example, if it consists of those who have committed some rare crime, say parricide. It is also superficial, since the good man will not shrink from virtuous actions merely on the ground that they will bring discomfort, unless he is already convinced that the opposite ought to be the aim of virtuous action.

When we look for some more cogent refutation, we may find one which is intellectual or one which has its basis in our emotions. Intellectually, we may argue that "sin" is a mistaken conception, since every man's acts are determined by his circumstances, over which he has only very partial control. (I shall examine this contention in the next chapter.) Emotionally, we may find in ourselves either a negative feeling of impartiality or a positive feeling of universal benevolence; either of

these, if strongly felt, will prevent us from adopting an ethic which divides mankind into sheep and goats. But neither can be *proved* cogent in arguments with a man whose emotions are different.

It is now time to sum up the conclusions suggested by the above somewhat discursive discussions.

There is a concept of "subjective rightness" which is clear and definite: an act is "subjectively right" if the agent has towards it an emotion of approval, and "subjectively wrong" if he has an emotion of disapproval. But if we say "a man ought to do what, for him, is subjectively right", we find ourselves committed to intolerable paradoxes. We are thus driven to seek a concept of "objective rightness", which shall be valid for all men, and shall enable us to arrive at universal moral rules. We *may* say that there is such a concept, that it is indefinable, and that we have a faculty of ethical intuition enabling us to say that acts of such-and-such kinds are objectively right, while acts of opposite kinds are objectively wrong. If we say this, we cannot be refuted, but we cannot prove that we are right if we have to argue with a man who denies ethical intuition or has intuitions differing from ours. When we examine the causes of what are said to be ethical intuitions, we find that they are to be found mainly in the emotions of praise or blame felt in our social environment, but partly also in our own emotions of love or hate, dominance or submission, and so on. Differences as to moral rules have their source partly in differences as to matters of fact (for instance, as to the possibility of witchcraft), but partly also in emotional differences between different individuals or communities. It seems therefore, that there is no reason to assume such a thing as "moral intuition", and that when I say that an act is "objectively right" I am really expressing an emotion, though grammatically I seem to be making an assertion.

It follows that there is nothing truly objective in the supposed concept of "objective rightness", except in so far as the desires of different men coincide.

When I say: "A right act is one which aims at the greatest possible satisfaction of the desires of sentient beings", I may be giving a purely verbal definition of "right", but I certainly imply something more than this. I imply (1) that I feel an emotion of approval towards such acts, (2) that I have an emotion of either impartiality or benevolence or both, which makes me unwilling to value the good of one man more than an equal good enjoyed by another, (3) that my view is one which could be held by all men, which would not be the case if, for instance, I proclaimed my own good to be the *summum bonum*, and finally (4) that I should wish my view to be held by all men.

It follows that ethical argument, when it is not merely as to the best means to a given end, differs from scientific argument in being addressed to the emotions, however it may disguise itself by use of the indicative mood. It must not be supposed that, on this account, ethical argument is impossible; it is as easy, if not easier, to influence emotions by argument as to influence intellectual convictions. The difficulty that will be felt is that, in intellectual argument, there is supposed to be a standard of impersonal truth to which we are appealing, while in ethics, on the above view, there appears to be no such standard. This difficulty is real and profound. I shall consider its scope in a later chapter.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Sin*

THE sense of sin has been one of the dominant psychological facts in history, and is still at the present day of great importance in the mental life of a large proportion of mankind. But although the *sense* of sin is easy to recognize and define, the *concept* of "sin" is obscure, especially if we attempt to interpret it in non-theological terms. In this chapter I wish to consider the sense of sin psychologically and historically, and then to examine whether there is any non-theological concept in terms of which this emotion can be rationalized.

Some "enlightened" persons believe themselves to have seen through "sin", and to have discarded the whole complex of beliefs and emotions with which it is associated. But most of these persons, if scrutinized, will be found to have only rejected some prominent part of the received moral code—e.g. the prohibition of adultery—but to have retained, none the less, a moral code of their own, to which they give complete adherence. A man may, for instance, be a conspirator in a left-wing movement in a Fascist country; in the pursuit of his public objects he may consider himself justified in deceiving and hoodwinking half-hearted "fellow-travellers", in stealing from the funds of reactionaries, in making love insincerely with a view to discovering secrets, and in committing murder when the situation seems to demand it. He may at all times express himself with a devastating moral cynicism. Yet this very man, if he is caught and tortured with a view to discovering his confederates, may display a heroic endurance beyond the capacity of many who would consider him ethically vile. If he does at last give way and betray his comrades, he is likely to feel a burning sense of

shame which may drive him to suicide. Or to take a very different example, a man may, like the hero of Shaw's *Doctor's Dilemma*, be morally contemptible in all respects except where his artistic conscience is involved, but in this one matter may be capable of very painful sacrifices. I am not prepared to maintain that to all men there are some acts that are felt as "sin"; I am willing to believe that there are human beings who are utterly shameless. But I am convinced that they are few, and that they are not to be found among those who most loudly proclaim their own emancipation from moral scruples.

Most psycho-analysts make much of the sense of guilt or sin, which many of them seem to regard as innate. I cannot agree with them in this. I believe the psychological origin of the sense of guilt in the young to be fear of punishment or disapproval by parents or whoever is in authority. If a feeling of guilt is to result from punishment or disapproval, it is necessary, however, that authority should be respected, and not merely feared; where there is only fear, the natural reaction is an impulse to deceit or rebellion. It is natural to young children to respect their parents, but schoolboys are less apt to respect their teachers, with the result that only fear of punishment, not sense of sin, restrains them from many acts of disobedience. Disobedience, if it is to *feel* sinful, must be disobedience to an authority inwardly respected and acknowledged. A dog caught stealing a leg of mutton may have this feeling if he is caught by his master, but not if he is caught by a stranger.

The psycho-analysts however, are certainly right in tracing the origins of a man's sense of sin to the very early years of childhood. In those years parental precepts are unquestioningly accepted, but impulse is too strong for them to be always obeyed; hence experience of disapproval is frequent and painful, and so is temptation which may be successfully resisted. In later life the parental disapproval may come to be almost forgotten, and yet there may still be a feeling of something painful associated with certain kinds of acts, and this feeling

may translate itself into the conviction that such acts are sinful. For those who believe that sin consists in disobedience to God the Father, the change of emotional pattern is very slight.

However, many men who do not believe in God nevertheless have a sense of sin. This may be merely a subconscious association with parental disapproval, or it may be fear of the bad opinion of a man's own herd, when the man is not a rebel against the herd's standards. Sometimes it is the sinner's own disapproval, quite independently of what others think, that makes him feel wicked. This is not likely to happen except to men who are unusually self-reliant or have exceptional gifts. If Columbus had abandoned the attempt to find the Indies, no one else would have blamed him, but one can imagine that he would have felt degraded in his own eyes. Sir Thomas More was removed from Oxford in his youth, on account of his determination to learn Greek in spite of the disapproval of his father and the University authorities. No doubt if he had yielded to the advice of his elders and betters he would have had a sense of sin, though everyone would have praised him.

The sense of sin has played a very important part in religion, more especially the Christian religion. In the Catholic Church it was one of the main sources of the power of the priesthood, and did much to facilitate the victory of the Popes in their long struggle with the Emperors. Psychologically and doctrinally, the sense of sin reached its acme in St. Augustine. But its origin lies far back in pre-historic times; in all the civilized nations of antiquity it was already well developed. In its earlier forms it was connected with ritual defilement and with breaches of tabu. Among the Greeks it was especially emphasized by the Orphics and by the philosophers whom they influenced. By the Orphics, as in India, sin was connected with transmigration: the sinful soul passed, after death, into the body of an animal, but after many purgative ages at last achieved emancipation from bondage to "the wheel of life". As Empedocles says:

"Whenever one of the daemons, whose portion is length of days, has sinfully polluted his hands with blood, or followed strife and forsworn himself, he must wander thrice ten thousand years from the abodes of the blessed, being born throughout the time in all manners of mortal forms. . . . One of these I now am, an exile and a wanderer from the gods, for that I put my trust in insensate strife".

In another fragment he says: "Ah, woe is me that the pitiless day of death did not destroy me ere ever I did evil deeds of devouring with my lips!" It seems probable that there "evil deeds" consisted of munching beans and laurel leaves, for he says: "Abstain wholly from laurel leaves", and again: "Wretches, utter wretches, keep your hands from beans!" These passages illustrate the fact that sin, as originally conceived, was not essentially something that injured some one else, but merely something forbidden. This attitude persists to our own day in much of orthodox doctrine on sexual morality.

The Christian conception of sin owes more to the Jews than to the Greeks. The Prophets attributed the Babylonian captivity to the wrath of God, which was kindled by the heathen practices that were still prevalent while Judea was independent. At first the sin was collective and the punishment collective, but gradually, as the Jews became accustomed to the absence of political independence, a more individualistic view came to prevail: it was the individual who sinned, and the individual who would be punished. For a long time punishment was expected in this life, with the corollary that prosperity was a proof of virtue. But during the persecution at the time of the Maccabees it became evident that the most virtuous were, in this life, the most unfortunate. This stimulated belief in a future life of rewards and punishments, in which Antiochus would suffer and his victims would triumph—a point of view which, with appropriate modifications, passed over into the early Church and sustained it during the persecutions.

Sin, however, is psychologically very different when imputed



to our enemies from what it is when thought of as our own shortcoming, for the one involves pride and the other humility. The extreme of humility is reached in the doctrine of original sin, of which the best exposition is to be found in St. Augustine. According to this doctrine, Adam and Eve were created with free will, and had the power of choice between good and evil. When they ate the apple they chose evil, and in that moment corruption entered into their souls. They and all their progeny were thenceforth unable to choose the good by the strength of their own unaided wills; only Divine Grace enabled the elect to live virtuously. Divine Grace is bestowed, without any guiding principle, upon some of those who have been baptized, but upon no one else, with the exception of certain of the Patriarchs and Prophets. The rest of mankind, although, since Grace is withheld, they are fatally predestined to sin, yet, because of their sin, are justly objects of God's wrath, and as such will suffer eternal perdition. St. Augustine enumerates the sins committed by infants at the breast, and does not shrink from the conclusion that infants who die unbaptized go to hell. The elect go to heaven because God chooses to make them the objects of His mercy: they are virtuous because they are elect, not elect because they are virtuous.

This ferocious doctrine, though accepted by Luther and Calvin, has not, since their time, been the orthodox teaching of the Catholic Church, and is now accepted by very few Christians, of whatever denomination. Nevertheless hell is still part of Catholic dogma, though fewer people suffer damnation than was formerly supposed. And hell is justified as the appropriate punishment for sin.

The doctrine of original sin, according to which we all deserve punishment because of Adam's transgression, is one which strikes most people at the present day as unjust, although there are many who see no injustice when analogous doctrines are proclaimed in politics—for example, when it is thought right that German children born since 1939 should starve

because their parents did not oppose the Nazis. This, however, even by its supporters, is recognized as rough human justice, and not of a sort to be ascribed to the Deity. The standpoint of modern liberal theologians is well set forth by Dr. Tennant in his book *The Concept of Sin*. According to him sin consists in acts of will that are in conscious opposition to a known moral law, the moral law being known by Revelation as God's will. It follows that a man destitute of religion cannot sin:

"If we press the indispensableness of the religious element in the concept of sin, and if we adopt the psychical definition of religion, then it will follow that persons, if any there be, possessing no religion—who would confess, that is to say, to entertaining no ideas of deity or of the supernatural, and to feeling no religious sentiment of any sort—cannot be accounted sinners at all, in the sense in which we agree to use that term, however morally evil, even from their own point of view, may be their lives."<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to know exactly what is meant by this statement, owing to the qualifications with which it is introduced. By the "psychical" definition of religion the author means, as he has previously explained, whatever a man accepts in the way of religion, and not only what Christians regard as true religion. But it is not clear what is meant by "feeling no religious sentiment of any sort". I myself have "sentiments"—emotions and moral convictions—which are apt to be associated with Christian beliefs, but I have no "ideas of deity or of the supernatural". I am not quite sure, therefore, whether, in Dr. Tennant's view, I am or am not capable of "sin". Nor am I sure whether, in my own view, there is a valid concept deserving to be called "sin". I know that certain acts, if I perform them, fill me with shame. I know that I find cruelty detestable and that I wish it did not exist; I know that failure to use to the full such talents as I may possess would feel to me like treachery to an ideal. But I am by no means certain how to rationalize these

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 216.

feelings, nor whether, if I succeeded in rationalizing them, the result would afford a definition of "sin".

If "sin" means "disobedience to the known will of God", then clearly sin is impossible for those who do not believe in God or do not think that they know His will. But if "sin" means "disobedience to the voice of conscience", then it can exist independently of theological beliefs. If it means only this, however, it lacks some properties commonly associated with the word "sin". Sin is usually thought of as deserving punishment, not only as a deterrent or as an incentive to reform, but on grounds of abstract justice. The sufferings of hell, theologians assure us, do not make tortured souls morally better; on the contrary, they persist in sin through all eternity, and have no power to do otherwise. The belief in "sin" as something meriting the purely retributive infliction of pain is one which cannot be reconciled with any ethic at all analogous to that which I have been maintaining, though it has been advocated independently of theology, for instance in G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*. When retribution for its own sake is not thought a good, the concepts of "justice" and "punishment" need re-interpretation.

"Justice", in its legalistic interpretation, might be taken to mean "reward according to desert". But when retributive punishment for its own sake is no longer advocated, this can only mean "reward and punishment on the system most likely to promote socially desirable conduct". It might happen, on occasion, that a man who expected punishment would undergo a change of heart if he were given a free pardon; in that case, it would be right to pardon him. It might also happen that a man who has acted in a socially desirable manner might have set an example which ought not to be followed in apparently similar cases, and on this account it might be proper to punish him. (Nelson's blind eye.) In short, rewards and punishments should be awarded according to the desirability of their social effects, and not according to some supposed absolute standard of

merit or demerit. No doubt it will, as a rule, be wise to reward those whose conduct is socially desirable and punish those whose conduct is harmful, but exceptions are conceivable and are likely actually to occur from time to time. Such a conception of "justice" as underlies the belief in heaven and hell is not defensible if "right" conduct is that which promotes the satisfaction of desire.

The conception of "sin" is closely connected with the belief in free will, for, if our actions are determined by causes over which we have no control, retributive punishment can have no justification. I think the ethical importance of free will is sometimes exaggerated, but it cannot be denied that the question is relevant in relation to "sin", and something must therefore be said about it.

"Free will" must be taken to mean that a volition is not always, or not necessarily, the result of previous causes. But the word "cause" has not as clear a meaning as could be wished. The first step towards clarity is to substitute "causal law" for "cause". We shall say that an event is "determined" by previous events if there is a law by means of which it can be inferred if a sufficient number of previous events are known. We can predict the movements of the planets because they follow from the law of gravitation. Sometimes human actions are equally predictable: it may be that Mr. So-and-So, on meeting a stranger, never fails to mention his acquaintance with Lord Such-and-such. But as a general rule we are not able to predict with any accuracy what people will do. This may be only from inadequate knowledge of the relevant laws, or it may be because there are no laws that invariably connect a man's actions with his past and present circumstances. The latter possibility, which is that of free will, is always unhesitatingly rejected except when people are thinking about the free-will problem. No one says: It is useless to punish theft, because perhaps people henceforth will like punishment. No one says: It is useless to address a letter, because the postman,

having free will, may decide to deliver it somewhere else. No one says: It is useless to offer wages for work that you wish done, because people may prefer starvation. If free will were common, all social organization would be impossible, since there would be no way of influencing men's actions.

While, therefore, as a philosopher I hold the principle of universal causation to be open to question, as a common-sense individual I hold that it is an indispensable postulate in the conduct of affairs. For practical purposes we must assume that our volitions have causes, and our ethics must be compatible with this assumption.

Praise and blame, rewards and punishments, and the whole apparatus of the criminal law, are rational on the deterministic hypothesis, but not on the hypothesis of free will, for they are all mechanisms designed to cause volitions that are in harmony with the interests of the community, or what are believed to be its interests. But the conception of "sin" is only rational on the assumption of free will, for, on the deterministic hypothesis, when a man does something that the community would wish him not to do, that is because the community has not provided adequate motives to cause him not to do it, or perhaps could not have provided adequate motives. We all recognize this second possibility in the case of insanity: a homicidal lunatic would not be deterred from murder even if he were certain to be hanged for it, and therefore it is useless to hang him. But sane people, when they commit a murder, usually do so in the hope of escaping detection, and it is this fact that makes it worth while to punish them when they are detected. Murder is punished, not because it is a sin and it is good that sinners should suffer, but because the community wishes to prevent it, and fear of punishment causes most people to abstain from it. This is completely compatible with the deterministic hypothesis, and completely incompatible with the hypothesis of free will.

I conclude that free will is not essential to any rational ethic,

but only to the vindictive ethic that justifies hell and holds that "sin" should be punished regardless of any good that punishment may do. I conclude also that "sin", except in the sense of conduct towards which the agent, or the community, feels an emotion of disapproval, is a mistaken concept, calculated to promote needless cruelty and vindictiveness when it is others that are thought to sin, and a morbid self-abasement when it is ourselves whom we condemn.

But it must not be supposed that, in rejecting the concept of "sin", we are maintaining that there is no difference between right and wrong actions. "Right" actions are those that it is useful to praise, "wrong" actions are those that it is useful to blame. Praise and blame remain as powerful incentives, tending to promote conduct which serves the general interest. Rewards and punishments also remain. But with regard to punishment the rejection of "sin" makes a difference that has some practical importance, for on the view which I advocate the punishment is always *per se* an evil, and is only justified by its deterrent or reformative effect. If it were possible to keep the public persuaded that burglars go to prison, while in fact they are made happy in some remote South Sea island, that would be better than punishment; the only objection to the scheme is that it would inevitably leak out sooner or later, and then there would be a general outbreak of burglary.

What applies to punishment applies also to blame. The fear of being blamed is a very powerful deterrent, but actual blame, when the blameworthy action has been performed, is, as a rule, painful without being morally helpful. The person blamed is likely to become sullen and defiant, to despair of the good opinion of the community, and to acquiesce in the position of an Ishmael. This result is especially probable when it is not an individual, but a large group, that is blamed. After the first world war the victors told the Germans that the guilt was wholly Germany's, and even forced them to sign a document by which they pretended to acknowledge their sole culpability.

After the second world war Montgomery issued a proclamation telling German parents to explain to their children that British soldiers could not smile at them because of the wickedness of their fathers and mothers. This was, on both occasions, bad psychology and bad politics, of a sort that is encouraged by belief in the doctrine of "sin". We are all what our circumstances have made us, and if that is unsatisfactory to our neighbours, it is for them to find ways of improving us. It is very seldom that moral reprobation is the best way of achieving this object.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Ethical Controversy*

THE question I wish to discuss in this chapter is: when two individuals, or two groups, differ as to what is desirable, are there any means, and if so what, of showing that one party is in the right? To avoid arousing active partisan feeling, let us take some dead issue, for example slavery. For a long time slavery was accepted without question; then there was a controversy lasting about a hundred years; then it was decided that the world was better without slavery. If we put ourselves back, in imagination, into the period of controversy, what has ethics to say as to how we ought to have made up our minds?

In a practical political issue there are three kinds of dispute that may be involved. First: the dispute may be wholly as to means, and there may be no disagreement as to ends. Secondly: it may be held by one party that acts of certain kinds are inherently wicked, quite independently of their consequences, while the other party does not admit any such inherent wickedness. Thirdly: there may be a genuine difference as to the ends at which human actions should aim. In most actual political disputes these three grounds of disagreement are all present, but in a theoretical discussion it is important to keep them apart.

Political disagreements are often genuinely as to means, and still more often apparently so. Opinions for or against the gold standard are, as a rule, genuinely based on estimates of the merit or demerit of different currency systems considered as means. But when we come to such a question as (say) the 40-hour week, we find that men's views as to means depend upon what ends they value. Employers will say that production



will be disastrously lowered by a reduction in the number of working hours, while statisticians who are friendly to labour will maintain that increased efficiency will prevent a diminution of output. It is obvious that there must be a certain number of hours per day which will produce the maximum output, and that this number must be greater than 0 and less than 24 (since a man must sleep and eat). In the hey-day of capitalism, employers thought 16 hours a day reasonable, but obviously this was an over-estimate. If labour were to become as omnipotent as capital was in the early nineteenth century, too low a figure would probably be put forward with equal confidence. This illustrates the rule that controversies as to matters of fact are very often due to an absence of disinterestedness in those who pretend to be ascertaining the facts. But where this happens it is because one side, or both, has or have aims that cannot be avowed, since the general public has an aim which both sides have to profess to be pursuing. From the point of view of the general public, which listens in bewilderment to the rival experts, the dispute is genuinely as to means, not as to ends.

A dispute as to means is one which raises no ethical issue, but is to be decided, if it can be decided at all, on purely scientific grounds. In the days when slavery was a controversial issue, its opponents argued that it was a wasteful method of production, while its advocates denied this. In fact its whole-hearted opponents would not have become favourable to it if it had been shown to be not wasteful, and its whole-hearted advocates would not have turned against it if it had been shown to be wasteful. The argument on each side was addressed to the undecided general public, which wanted cotton goods to be cheap, but cared little about slave labour on Southern plantations or child labour in Lancashire factories. For those to whom the issue of fact was decisive, slavery and child labour were not ethical questions.

The realization that disputes as to means are not ethical

disputes removes from the sphere of ethics a very large part of the practical questions as to which men disagree.

I come now to the second ground of dispute, namely, where one party, but not the other, considers acts of certain kinds inherently wicked, quite apart from their consequences. Slavery may be condemned on this ground by a believer in the rights of man, or by a person who agrees with Kant in holding that every individual human being should be an end in himself. But the issue is clearer where some definite tabu is involved. Hindus think it wicked to kill a cow, even when it is in great pain. Humanitarian English people think it cruel to keep the cow alive in such circumstances. Antiochus IV thought it desirable that all his subjects should be hellenized and cured of their native customs, but the Jews, or at least the more heroic among them, were willing to die rather than eat pork or abandon circumcision. The Amish in Pennsylvania have a moral abhorrence of buttons, and will suffer persecution sooner than send their children to State schools.

What can argument effect in such a case? I do not think that it can effect anything *directly*: there is no way of *proving* that buttons are not immoral. But given an open mind and the leisure required for a large survey, there is an argument which, while not logically compulsive, ought to carry weight with a candid inquirer. The kind of argument I have in mind is the kind by which, in earlier chapters, I tried to show that good and bad, rather than right and wrong, are the fundamental concepts of ethics, "right" acts being those calculated to have good effects, and "wrong" acts those calculated to have bad effects. If, by a long course of anthropology and history, you have brought an Amish to admit this, you can then ask him: "What harm do buttons do?" If he can show you that they do harm, you will have to adopt his opinion; if not, he will have to adopt yours.

There is, however, a proviso to be made as regards immediate judgments of right and wrong. When an act, however

innocent in itself, inspires a man with genuine emotions of horror, he cannot be happy if he has to see it being performed. If you had a guest who thought it wicked to play cards on Sunday, while the rest of the company had no such scruple, you would be guilty of unkindness if you ignored his feelings. In this way what is *thought* to be right or wrong may really become right or wrong (as the case may be) so long as the belief persists. This does not show that the belief is true, but merely that it generates desires and aversions which are data in deciding what is good in the sense of satisfying desire. In fact, men's feelings of admiration or horror in regard to a certain kind of act are, while they persist, often among the most important factors in deciding whether that kind of act is right or wrong.

The cases in which an ethical controversy is most difficult to decide on rational grounds are those where there is a genuine difference as to ends. Such cases are less frequent than appears at first sight. Russian aristocrats, until the middle of the nineteenth century, tended to regard their serfs as of no account, not so much because they had a different conception of the good from that of the opponents of serfdom, as because they believed that serfs did not have the same capacity for emotion as their masters. Turgenev's *Sportsman's Sketches*, with all the art of a great novelist, gave a sympathetic portrait of the serfs' joys and sorrows, thereby arousing sensibility à la Rousseau in liberal-minded landowners. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* performed the same service for slaves in the United States. In both countries, when men could no longer deny that the oppressed had the same capacity for joy and sorrow as their oppressors, the oppressive institution was abolished. The controversy between its enemies and its defenders was not therefore, really a controversy as to ends, but as to the facts of 'human beings' emotions.

Apart from arguments as to the sensibilities of slaves, there are two grounds on which slavery may be defended: (1) that it

is essential to civilization; (2) that slaves don't count, i.e. that they are mere means, and their experiences are neither good nor bad. Of these only the second involves an argument as to ends. The first has a measure of truth, and in the past had much more. The Egyptian and Babylonian priests who developed writing and the rudiments of mathematics and astronomy obtained their leisure by the employment of slaves, and in those days, when one man's labour produced only a little more than the necessities required to keep him and his children alive, there would have been no leisure if there had not been privileged classes and classes condemned to servile toil. The young men in Plato's dialogues show a devotion to philosophy which depends upon financial security and a smoothly running household of slaves. Lord Melbourne, whose conversation at Holland House, as recorded by Greville, is still fascinating in its breadth of culture, and who endured with such civilized fortitude the Byronic extravagances of his wife, derived the income which made his merits possible from the torture of children in coal mines. We must therefore admit that slavery and social injustice have, in the past, served a useful purpose in the development of civilization. I shall not consider how far this is still the case as I do not wish to embark upon political controversy.

The second ground, of those mentioned above, on which slavery may be defended, namely that slaves are mere means, raises issues that are ethically more fundamental than those that we have been considering hitherto. They are essentially the same as the issues that we considered in Chapter V, on partial and general goods. What considerations can be brought to bear upon a man who announces that he will only concern himself with the good of some group, or even of himself alone? The egoist, the nationalist, the man who cares only for his own class or for the adherents of his own creed, all have limited sympathies. Is there anything to be said which can induce them to abandon their partiality, in practice if not in theory?

It is clear that we come up here against the ancient question of the harmony of private and public interests. Every man, we have agreed, will necessarily pursue the satisfaction of his own desires; he will therefore only act in a manner to promote the general good if his own desires lead to acts that have this result. They may have this result because he desires the general good, or because the social system is such that his selfish interests are best served by acts that are useful to the public. I do not believe that a complete harmony of private and public interests is possible, and, where it is not possible, I fear that ethical argument fails. But I think there is much less disharmony than is commonly supposed.

Let us take again the case of slavery. In a community where slaves are numerous, there is a perpetual fear of a servile insurrection, and such insurrections, when they come, are apt to be very terrible. Fear makes slave-owners cruel, and to many among them the cruelty must be distasteful. Sympathy with suffering, especially with physical suffering, is to some extent a natural impulse: children are apt to cry when they hear their brothers or sisters crying. This natural impulse has to be curbed by slave-owners, and when curbed it easily passes into its opposite, producing an impulse to cruelty for its own sake. But impulses of this kind are not unmingled, and their satisfaction does not bring contentment. And the more they are indulged, the more fear is intensified. In such a life there can be no inward peace. Men who accept and practise currently licensed forms of social injustice may despise the tranquillity of the sage and the saint, but they despise it from ignorance. I do not doubt that the many Christian saints who renounced the world and embraced poverty enjoyed more personal happiness than they could have experienced if they had retained their possessions. And certainly Socrates was a happy man down to the very moment of his death.

Let us take another illustration, more germane to current affairs than that of slavery—I mean, nationalism. The world at

the present moment (1946) is full of angry and suspicious groups: Jews and Arabs, Hindus and Moslems, Yugoslavs and Italians, Russians and Anglo-Americans, not to mention the submerged Germans and Japanese. Each of these groups believes its interests to be incompatible with those of a group to which it is hostile, and has no moral scruples in pursuing what it holds to be its own interests at no matter what cost to its enemies. All statesmen realize that if this attitude persists the outcome must be another world war, fought with atomic bombs, and involving all the combatants in a common ruin. Zionists will be exterminated and their works in the Promised Land destroyed; Arabs will survive only in small numbers in the desert. Hindus and Moslems alike will see their sacred cities destroyed, their populations reduced by war and famine to a small fraction of their present numbers, and their fertile lands reverting to wilderness. If there is no agreement about Trieste, Trieste, in common with other cities, will cease to exist. If Russia and the Western democracies cannot compose their differences peaceably, neither communism nor democratic capitalism will survive, but only roving bands of anarchic brigands. This is not what is desired by any of the wrangling groups, but it is what will inevitably result if they are incapable of perceiving to how large an extent the true interests of each group are bound up with the general good as opposed to the illusory hope of their private and particular victory.

The above considerations illustrate the fact that, in political arguments, it is seldom necessary to appeal to ethical considerations, since enlightened self-interest usually affords a sufficient motive for action in accordance with the general good. But although in general (not always) the appeal to self-interest is valid, it is often far less effective than an appeal to altruistic motives. Hatred, envy, and contempt blind men to their own interests; on the other hand, sympathy and pity prompt actions useful to others, even if no advantage to self is expected. Generous emotions are more likely than calculated

selfishness to lead to the very actions which calculated selfishness would recommend if the calculation were correct, but so long as men's hearts are cold they are likely to remain blind to the fact that co-operation is usually more advantageous to both parties than competition.

When there is in fact a genuine conflict between the total desires of one man and the total desires of another—where, that is to say, two states of affairs are possible, and one will be more pleasing to A, while the other will be more pleasing to B—it does not seem possible, so long as we confine ourselves to the two individuals, to advocate any argument in favour of the one as against the other. But this does not mean quite what it might seem to mean, since both A and B have to take account of the desires of others. If A would like to steal B's money, his wish is likely to be counteracted by the desire to escape censure and punishment. Each individual might profit by theft, provided he were the only thief; but everybody profits by other people's abstinence from theft. In such cases there is a general interest which is opposed to what would be the interest of individuals if the general interest could not make itself felt. Law and government are institutions by which it is sought to bring the general interest to bear on the individual; so is public opinion in the form of praise and blame. The consequence is that, where the police are efficient, the great majority of the population find it advantageous to abstain from crime. But in the relations between sovereign States, where there is no law and no government, the arguments against national self-seeking at the expense of the rest of the world, though valid, are not sufficiently obvious to be understood either by statesmen or by large sections of the population.

What a man will consider to constitute his happiness depends upon his passions, and these in turn depend upon his education and social circumstances as well as upon his congenital endowment. It is obvious that the attention of the young can be directed to matters in which their interests harmonize with

those of others, or to matters in which there is conflict. At present, in most parts of the world, schools teach co-operation within the nation but competition elsewhere; this practice is bringing our era to a disastrous end, and will probably prevent most of those now in school from reaching middle age. It would be just as easy to teach loyalty to mankind, and on the basis of this sentiment to build an international State, by means of which the human race could attain a level of happiness and well-being far surpassing anything hitherto achieved. But no Great Power would dream of accepting such a measure of intellectual disarmament, though all know that the penalty for continuing the present policy is universal destruction.

I will conclude this chapter by summarizing previous arguments against what may be called the Nietzschean view, namely, that only a section of mankind are to be considered as ends, while the rest are merely means. In the first place, as soon as the section is defined, the theory will become unacceptable to all who do not belong to it; it cannot be expected, for instance, that men who are not white should admit that the world exists for the exclusive benefit of white men. So long as white men retain supremacy, men of other colours will preach the Rights of Man, and say that all men are equal. But if men of some other colour have some prospect of success, as the Japanese believed themselves to have after Pearl Harbour, they will become converts to the Nietzschean philosophy, merely substituting "yellow" for "white"—a change of no logical importance. They will then in their turn be defeated, and claims will be made on behalf of the brown men or the black men. I even once met a Mexican Marxist, who contended that the essential message of Marx was the supremacy of the Red man, because none of the Red men in Mexico were capitalists. It is obvious that this doctrine of the supremacy of a section of mankind can only breed endless strife, with periodic changes as to which group is to be dominant. At each stage there will have to be oppression and cruelty to preserve the



supremacy of the momentary Lords of the World. At all times there will be fear of insurrection, police tyranny, and indignant suffering for large sections of mankind. The rulers will not be happy, because they will fear assassination or rebellion. The dominant race will have to close their hearts to sympathy and their minds to facts. In the end they will perish in a bloody rebellion. No man would choose such a life with his eyes open. The Nietzschean theory is a dream, but in practice it is a nightmare.

## CHAPTER IX

### *Is there Ethical Knowledge?*

WE come now at last to the problem to which all our previous ethical discussions have been leading. The question may be put in dry technical language, or in language showing that it involves issues of great emotional importance. Let us begin with the latter.

If we say "cruelty is wrong", or "you ought to love your neighbour as yourself", are we saying something which has impersonal truth or falsehood, or are we merely expressing our own preferences? If we say "pleasure is good and pain is bad", are we making a statement, or are we merely expressing an emotion which would be more correctly expressed in a different grammatical form, say "Hurrah for pleasure, and away dull care"? When men dispute or go to war about a political issue, is there any sense in which one side is more in the right than the other, or is there merely a trial of strength? What is meant, if anything, by saying that a world in which human beings are happy is better than one in which they are unhappy? I, for one, find it intolerable to suppose that when I say "cruelty is bad" I am merely saying "I dislike cruelty", or something equally subjective. What I want to discuss is whether there is anything in ethics that is not, in the last analysis, subjective.

To put the same problem in more technical language: When we examine what purport to be ethical statements, we find that they differ from statements asserting matters of fact by the presence of one or both of two terms, "ought" and "good", or their synonyms. Are these terms, or equivalents of them, part of any minimum vocabulary of ethics? Or are they definable in terms of desires and emotions and feelings? And, if so, do they

have essential reference to the desires and emotions and feelings of the person using the words, or have they a reference to the general desires and emotions and feelings of mankind? There are words such as "I", "here", "now", which have a different meaning for each different person who uses them, or even on each different occasion when they are used. Such words I call "egocentric". Our question is: Are ethical terms egocentric?

In discussing the above questions I shall repeat in abbreviated form arguments which have occurred in earlier chapters, but this time we must arrive at decisions, and not, as before, leave many questions open.

One possible theory is that "ought" is indefinable, and that we know by ethical intuition one or more propositions about the kinds of acts that we ought, or ought not, to perform. There is no *logical* objection to this theory, and I am not prepared to reject it decisively. It has, however, a grave drawback, namely, that there is no general agreement as to what sorts of acts ought to be performed, and that the theory affords no means of deciding who is in the right where there is disagreement. It thus becomes, in practice though not in theory, an egocentric doctrine. If A says "you ought to do this" and B says "No, you ought to do that", you only know that these are their opinions, and you have no means of knowing which, if either, is right. You can only escape from this conclusion by saying dogmatically: "Whenever there is a dispute as to what ought to be done, I am in the right, and those who disagree with me are mistaken". But as those who disagree will make a similar claim, ethical controversy will become merely a clash of rival dogmas. These considerations lead us to abandon "ought" as the fundamental ethical term. Let us see whether we can do any better with the concept "good".

We shall call something "good" if it has value on its own account, independently of its effects. Perhaps, since the term "good" is ambiguous, we shall do well to substitute the term

"intrinsic value". Thus the theory that we are now to examine is the theory that there is an indefinable which we are calling "intrinsic value", and that we know, by a different kind of ethical intuition from that considered in connection with "ought", that certain kinds of things possess intrinsic value. The term has a negative, to which we will give the name "disvalue". A possible ethical intuition of the sort appropriate to our present theory would be: "Pleasure has intrinsic value, and pain has intrinsic disvalue". We shall now define "ought" in terms of intrinsic value: an act "ought" to be performed if, of those that are possible, it is the one having the most intrinsic value. To this definition we must add the principle: "The act having most intrinsic value is the one likely to produce the greatest balance of intrinsic value over intrinsic disvalue, or the smallest balance of intrinsic disvalue over intrinsic value". An intrinsic value and an intrinsic disvalue are defined as equal when the two together have zero intrinsic value.

This theory, like its predecessor, is not logically refutable. It has the advantage, over the theory which makes "ought" fundamental, that there are much fewer disagreements as to what has intrinsic value than as to what ought to be done. And when we examine disagreements as to what ought to be done, we find, usually, though perhaps not always, that they are derived from disagreements as to the effects of actions. A savage may believe that infringing a tabu causes death; some sabbatarians believe that working on Sunday leads to defeat in war. Such considerations suggest that moral rules are really based on an estimate of consequences even when they seem to be absolute. And if we judge the morality of an act by its consequences, we seem driven to adopt some such definition of "ought" as that suggested at the end of the last paragraph. Our present theory is, therefore, a definite improvement upon the theory which makes "ought" indefinable.

There are, however, still objections, some analogous to the former ones, and some of a new kind. Although there is more

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agreement as to intrinsic value than as to rules of conduct, there are still some disagreements that are serious. One of these is as to vindictive punishment. Is there intrinsic value in inflicting pain upon those whose acts have intrinsic disvalue? Believers in hell must answer in the affirmative, and so must all those who believe that the purpose of the criminal law should not be merely deterrent and reformatory. Some stern moralists have maintained that pleasure has no intrinsic value, but I do not think they were quite sincere in this, as they maintained at the same time that the virtuous will be happy in heaven. The question of vindictive punishment is more serious, because, as in the case of disagreement about moral rules, there is no way in which the matter can be argued: if you think it good and I think it bad, neither of us can advance any reasons whatever in support of our belief.

There is a consideration of quite another kind, which, while not conclusive, tends to throw doubt on the view that intrinsic value is indefinable. When we examine the things to which we are inclined to attach intrinsic value, we find that they are all things that are desired or enjoyed. It is difficult to believe that anything would have value in a universe devoid of sentience. This suggests that "intrinsic value" may be definable in terms of desire or pleasure or both.

If we say "pleasure is good and pain is bad", do we mean anything more than "we like pleasure and dislike pain"? It seems as if we must mean something more than this, but this is certainly a part of what we mean. We cannot attribute intrinsic value to everything that is desired, because desires conflict, for instance in a war, where each side desires its own victory. We could perhaps evade this difficulty by saying that only states of mind have intrinsic value. In that case, if A and B compete for something which only one of them can have, we shall say that there is intrinsic value in the pleasure of the victor, whichever he may be. There is now nothing which one of the two judges to have intrinsic value, while the other judges that the same

thing has intrinsic disvalue. A may admit that the pleasure which B would derive from victory would have intrinsic value, but may argue that B's victory is nevertheless to be prevented if possible, on account of its effects. Thus we shall now consider the definition: "Intrinsic value" means "the property of being a state of mind desired by the person who experiences it". This differs very little from the view that the good is pleasure. We come even nearer to the good as pleasure if we substitute "enjoyed" for "desired" in the above definition.

I do not think the statement "the good is pleasure" is quite correct, but I think that most of the difficulties of ethics are the same when this statement is adopted as when we adopt one which seems to me more exact. I shall, therefore, for the sake of simplicity, adopt hypothetically, for the moment, the hedonistic definition of the good. It remains to examine how this definition can be connected with our ethical feelings and convictions.

Henry Sidgwick, in his *Methods of Ethics*, argued at length that all moral rules that are generally recognized can be deduced from the principle that we ought to aim at maximizing pleasure; he even contended that this principle accounts for the occasional exceptions that moral rules are admitted to have. There are occasions when most people would say that it is right to tell a lie, or to break a promise, or to steal or kill; all these the hedonist's principle explains. I think that, as regards the moral code of civilized communities, Sidgwick's contention is broadly true; at any rate, I am not prepared to argue against it, subject to these limitations.

What, on this theory, shall we say about praise and blame? Blame, when it is deliberate, is both an emotion and a judgment: I feel a dislike of the act that I blame, and I judge that I do right in feeling this dislike. The emotion is just a fact, and raises no theoretical issue, but the judgment is a more difficult matter. I certainly do not *mean*, when I judge an act to be right, that it is the act best calculated to maximize pleasure, for, if I

did, it would be logically impossible to dispute hedonism, which it is not. Perhaps the judgment is not really a judgment, but another emotion, namely, an emotion of approval towards my likes or dislikes. According to this view, when I deliberately, and not impulsively, blame an act, I dislike the act, and feel towards my dislike an emotion of approval.

Another person, who disagrees with me about ethics, may disapprove of my approval; he will express his feeling in what *seems* to be a judgment, saying "you ought not to have blamed that act", or something equivalent. But on our present theory he is still expressing an emotion; neither he nor I is making any assertion, and therefore our conflict is only practical, not theoretical.

If we define "right", the matter is different. We can then have a *judgment* "this is right". If our definition is not to have paradoxical results, our definition of "right" must be such that usually, when an act is right according to our definition, it is one towards which we feel the emotion of approval, and when it is wrong, it is one towards which we feel disapproval. We are thus led to seek for some common property of as many as possible of the acts commonly approved (or disapproved). If *all* had such a common property, we should have no hesitation in defining this as "right". But we do not find anything quite so convenient as this. What we do find is that most of the acts towards which people feel the emotion of approval have a certain common property, and that the exceptional acts, which have not this property, tend to be no longer approved of when people have become clearly aware of their exceptional character. We may then say, in a sense, that approval of such acts is mistaken.

We can now set up a series of fundamental propositions and definitions in Ethics.

(1) Surveying the acts which arouse emotions of approval or disapproval, we find that, as a general rule, the acts which are approved of are those believed likely to have, on the

balance, effects of certain kinds, while opposite effects are expected from acts that are disapproved of.

(2) Effects that lead to approval are defined as "good", and those leading to disapproval as "bad".

(3) An act of which, on the available evidence, the effects are likely to be better than those of any other act that is possible in the circumstances, is defined as "right"; any other act is "wrong". What we "ought" to do is, by definition, the act which is right.

(4) It is right to feel approval of a right act and disapproval of a wrong act.

These definitions and propositions, if accepted, provide a coherent body of ethical propositions, which are true (or false) in the same sense as if they were propositions of science.

It is clear that the difficulties are mainly concerned with the first proposition of the above series. We must therefore examine it more closely.

We have seen in previous chapters that different societies in different ages have given approval to a wide diversity of acts. Primitive communities, at a certain stage of development, approved of cannibalism and human sacrifice. Spartans approved of homosexuality, which to Jews and Christians was an abomination. Until the late seventeenth century, almost everybody approved of the burning of reputed witches, which we now regard as senseless cruelty. But these differences were rooted in differences of belief as to the effects of actions. Human sacrifice was supposed to promote fertility. The Spartans thought that homosexuality promoted courage in battle. We might still approve of the execution of witches, if we believed that they had the maleficent powers with which they were credited in the Middle Ages. The difference between ourselves and other ages in these respects is attributable to a difference between our beliefs and theirs as to the effects of actions. The actions which they condemned were such as, in their opinion, would have certain effects, and we agree



with them in thinking that such effects are to be avoided if possible.

We are thus led to the conclusion that there is more agreement among mankind as to the effects at which we should aim than as to the kinds of acts that are approved. I think the contention of Henry Sidgwick, that the acts which are approved of are those that are likely to bring happiness or pleasure, is, broadly speaking, true. Not infrequently, an ancient tabu, which it was formerly thought disastrous to infringe, may survive, through the force of custom and tradition, long after the beliefs which gave rise to it have been forgotten. But in such cases the tabu has a precarious life, and is apt to be thrown over by those who come across, by travel or by study, customs different from those in which they have been brought up.

I do not think, however, that pleasure is quite the nearest that we can come to the common quality of the great majority of approved actions. I think we must include such things as intelligence and aesthetic sensibility. If we were really persuaded that pigs are happier than human beings, we should not on that account welcome the ministrations of Circe. If miracles were possible, and we could choose exactly the life that we should prefer, most of us would prefer a life in which we could, at least part of the time, enjoy the delicate delights of art and intellect, to one consisting wholly of houris, wines, and hot baths—partly, no doubt, from fear of satiety, but not wholly. We do not, in fact, value pleasures in proportion to their intensity; some pleasures seem to us inherently preferable to others.

If it is admitted that the great majority of approved acts are such as are believed to have certain effects, and if it is found, further, that exceptional acts, which are approved without having this character, tend to be no longer approved when their exceptional character is realized, then it becomes possible, in a certain sense, to speak of ethical error. We may say that it is "wrong" to approve of such exceptional acts, meaning that

such approval does not have the effects which mark the great majority of approved acts, and which we have agreed to take as the criterion of what is "right".

Although, on the above theory, ethics contains statements which are true or false, and not merely optative or imperative, its basis is still one of emotion and feeling, the emotion of approval and the feeling of enjoyment or satisfaction, the former being involved in the definition of "right" and "wrong", the latter in that of "intrinsic value". And the appeal upon which we depend for the acceptance of our ethical theory is not the appeal to the facts of perception, but to the emotions and feelings which have given rise to the concepts of "right" and "wrong", "good" and "bad".

## CHAPTER X

### *Authority in Ethics*

THERE are various objections which are commonly raised against the kind of ethical system that we have been developing. One of these is that there seems to be a lack of authority about ethical maxims having no basis except that suggested in the foregoing chapters. I will consider this objection in the present chapter. Let us think, in the first place, what we mean by "authority". There is human authority, and, for the orthodox, there is Divine authority. There is the authority of Truth and there is the authority of conscience. In orthodox morals, all these combine. "Why ought I to do so and so?" "Because it is the Will of God—because it is what the community approve—because it is an eternal Truth that you ought to do so and so—because your conscience, if you will but listen to it, tells you that this is what you ought to do." In face of this ethical broadside, it is hoped that your carnal desires will shrink abashed. A community where all these kinds of authority are recognized will, it is thought, be more apt to do what it ought than a community governed by more mundane considerations. This is held to be so obvious that it is not submitted to any statistical test. I think that, if it were, the result might be surprising. Let us compare two communities, say thirteenth century Italy and modern England. In the former, practically everybody believed that rape led to Hell unless followed by due repentance. In modern England, few believe this. But, if one is to believe Salimbene, monks in thirteenth century Italy were more addicted to rape than any except a few recognized criminals in modern England. I think a broad survey of history makes it extremely doubtful whether such moral precepts as have

obvious ethical value are more obeyed where they have the above four-fold authority than in more free-thinking communities. This, however, is by the way, and it is time to come to grips with the difficulties that are likely to be felt.

We may crystallize our discussion round two questions: A. Why should *I* do what *you* say I ought? B. Where there are ethical disagreements, how shall we decide? Let us begin with A.

There is here, to begin with, a religious answer, which has the merit of simplicity. You should do what I say you ought, because that is the Will of God. The man who is not convinced by this simple answer may reply in either of two ways. He may say, "How do you know it is the Will of God?" or he may say, "Why should I obey God's Will?" To the second of these questions there is a simple answer: "God is omnipotent and, if you do not obey His Will, He will punish you. Whereas, if you do, you may get to Heaven." This answer pre-supposes egoistic hedonism, namely, the doctrine that every man should try to get as much pleasure for himself as possible. This has always been the orthodox Christian teaching, although rhetorically-minded moralists have tried to wrap it up in edifying phrases. It makes morality indistinguishable from prudence, which may be defined as the endurance of a small present evil for the sake of a great future good. The reasons for virtue in this doctrine are precisely identical with the reasons for not living beyond your income. The doctrine does not differ from that of secular moralists on any point of ethics, but only on a question of brute fact: namely, shall I, if I do A, enjoy eternal bliss in Heaven, but if I do B, suffer eternal torments in Hell? This is not an ethical question. I will therefore discuss it no further.

The more interesting question is, "How am I to know what is the Will of God?" Orthodox writers on ethics always make a point of the contention that *their* system is objective, while that of secular moralists is subjective. I think there is no truth

in this whatsoever. A doctrine is objective if it follows, by arguments generally recognized as valid, from facts not thought open to question. There must be some method of appealing to those who do not already hold the doctrine by means of considerations of which, in the end, they acknowledge the validity. There are controversies in science, but there are recognized methods of arriving at decisions. This is not the case when there are controversies as to the Will of God. Protestants tell us, or used to tell us, that it is contrary to the Will of God to work on Sundays. But Jews say that it is on Saturdays that God objects to work. Disagreement on this point has persisted for nineteen centuries, and I know no method of putting an end to the disagreement except Hitler's lethal chambers, which would not generally be regarded as a legitimate method in scientific controversy. Jews and Mohammedans assure us that God forbids pork, but Hindus say that it is beef that He forbids. Disagreement on this point has caused hundreds of thousands to be massacred in recent years. It can hardly be said, therefore, that the Will of God gives a basis for an objective ethic.

Why then do people cling to it so obstinately? Partly from tradition, but partly also for other reasons. It gives you an assurance and a certainty which are otherwise likely to be lacking. "Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war" is an invigorating exhortation. Those who are united in believing that the Will of God enjoins certain things which the enemy does not do may be expected to fight the enemy with more energy and gusto, and with less compunction, than if they were not inspired by this belief. In my occasional contacts with those in authority over our armed forces I have found almost all of them deeply religious, and, when I have inquired into the basis of their faith, I have usually found that they think belief in Christianity encouraging to those who have to drop hydrogen bombs. I will not, at the moment, argue this matter as it belongs rather to politics than to ethics. I will merely remark that, as one whose ethic has no supernatural source, I am not

wholly persuaded that readiness for large-scale homicide deserves whole-hearted ethical admiration.

A dispassionate inquirer, like myself, if anxious to ascertain what is the Will of God, will not confine himself to the opinions of his immediate neighbours, but will send out a questionnaire to leaders of religious thought throughout the world, since they, but not he, profess to have the necessary knowledge. I am afraid he will find it very difficult to discover any point upon which all are agreed, and he will be compelled to conclude that, by this road at any rate, ethical objectivity is unattainable.

There is a non-theological variant of what is really much the same doctrine. It consists in saying that we all know the meaning of the word "ought", and that we can perceive what we ought to do just as we can perceive that grass is green. The faculty by which we perceive this is called "conscience". According to this doctrine, the statement, "I ought to do X", is true or false in the same sense in which "grass is green" is true, and "blood is green" is false. Here the authority is no longer God's Will, but Truth. I have examined this doctrine in an earlier chapter, and shall therefore now deal with it briefly. There are just the same sort of disagreements as to what conscience prescribes as there are about the Will of God, and there is not, as in science, a recognized technique for resolving disagreements. The only recognized technique is that of government in a large sense. There is what the law enjoins, and there is what your neighbours approve or disapprove. This creates a certain amount of agreement among members of the same community or the same State, but it does not produce an agreement transcending frontiers or extending to different cultures. It has, therefore, no advantages over the Divine Will as a basis of ethics.

Before going further, let us consider for a moment the nature of our problem. We are inquiring into different possible meanings of the word "ought" when A says to B "you ought to do X". This question is in part factual. If A says "you ought

to obey the Will of God", it is a factual question whether there is a God and, if so, what He wills. But, as a rule, the question is not factual. Nor, on the other hand, is it logical. There are a host of possible answers to which it would be impossible to make a *logical* objection, but which nevertheless no one would seriously consider. You might say, "the virtuous man is the man who tries to cause as much pain as possible". If you said this, it would not be the logician who could refute you. What, then, makes us instantly reject such a suggestion? It is the fact that, as a rule, people do not desire to suffer pain. Or, again: Suppose you said, "the greatest evil is Sin, and I can manufacture robots which shall have no sexual parts and shall therefore be incapable of sin. I can make these robots do all the things that are usually praised. I can make them read the Bible. I can make them preach eloquent sermons. And I can make robot congregations that will weep and beat their breasts as they hear the robot preachers' moving sermons." All this is as yet a beautiful dream, but I daresay it will become possible within the next hundred years. But, if A said to B, "You ought to substitute robots for human beings, because robots do not sin", almost everybody would reply that the robot world, since it would be destitute of sentience, would be neither good nor bad, and would be in no way better than a world of ordinary matter unable to perform the robots' imitative tricks. Such considerations make it plain that whatever "ought" may mean, it has something to do with sentience and with desire. Where these are absent, there is neither good nor bad, neither virtue nor sin. It follows that, if our definition of "ought" is not to be arbitrary and paradoxical, it must bear some relation to sentience and desire. This is one requisite that our definition must fulfil.

There is another which takes us further into the heart of the matter. If ethics is to have any objectivity, we want to find a meaning of "ought" such that, when A says to B, "you ought to do X", this does not depend upon who A is. This at once

rules out a great many moral codes. If A is a theologically orthodox Aztec, the act X, which he ordains, may be that of killing and eating a human victim. If two nations, M and N, are at war with each other, and A is a member of nation M, the act X, which he commends, may be that of killing as many members of nation N as possible; while if A is a member of nation N, it will be citizens of nation M whose death he will prescribe. If you are a mediaeval Catholic, you will hold that it is wicked to kill by abortion a foetus in the womb of a heretic woman, but that it is virtuous to let the foetus be born and nourished until it becomes old enough to deserve death at the stake. If you are a modern Free-thinker, you will not agree with this opinion. How, then, are we to arrive at objectivity in our definition of "ought"?

One may lay it down broadly that the whole subject of ethics arises from the pressure of the community on the individual. Man is very imperfectly gregarious, and does not always instinctively feel the desires which are useful to his herd. The herd, being anxious that the individual should act in its interests, has invented various devices for causing the individual's interest to be in harmony with that of the herd. One of these is government, one is law and custom, and one is morality. Morality becomes an effective force in two ways: first, through the praise and blame of neighbours and authorities; and second, by the self-praise and self-blame which are called "conscience". Through these various forces—government, law, morals—the interest of the community is brought to bear upon the individual. It is to the interest of the community, for example, that no one should steal. But, apart from the above forces, it would be to my interest that I should steal, but no one else. Only tyrants can maintain themselves in this exceptional position, and tyrants are not approved when they no longer have power. I think we may say, in spite of the fact that tyrants occur, that the purpose of a moral code, in so far as it is not superstitious, is to bring the interest of the community



to bear upon the individual, and to produce an identity between his interest and that of his herd which would not otherwise exist.

We may say, therefore, as a first step towards the answer to our question, that, if A and B belong to the same herd, when A says to B, "you ought to have done X", he means, "the act X would have furthered the interests of the herd to which we both belong". This insures that any two persons who in the relevant respects belong to B's herd will give the same answer to the question if they make no mistake of fact, but it does not insure that people outside that herd will give the same answer. We are thus led to the question of partial and general goods which was discussed in an earlier chapter, and are led, by the arguments given in that chapter, to the conclusion that the only way to secure objectivity in the meaning of "ought" is to enlarge our herd until it embraces all human beings, or, better perhaps, everything sentient. In this way, and in this way only, can we insure that what A says B ought to do does not depend upon who A is. It is such considerations that lead me to adopt the following definition:

When A says to B, "you ought to do X", I shall define the word "ought" as meaning that, of all acts that are possible for B, X is the one most likely to further the interests of mankind, or of all sentient beings.

Although by the above method we have secured a measure of objectivity in our definition of 'ought', it should not be forgotten that, in a certain sense, the sanction of any morality is ultimately egoistic. A man's actions are partly reflex, partly habitual, and partly the result of desire. When I sneeze or yawn, I do not do so in the belief that this action furthers my interest. When I perform some purely habitual action, such as dressing, I may be quite unaware of what I am doing, and, in any case, am not deliberately choosing one course of action in preference to another, except when I am debating what clothes to wear. The moralist is not concerned with actions that are

merely reflex or habitual, but with deliberate choices. Now when I make a choice, it is *my* desires that are operative. The desires of others are only effective in so far as they influence mine. To say that I shall act on my own desires, is to utter a tautology. When moralists tell us, as they are too apt to do, that we ought to resist desire for the sake of higher things, what they really mean is that we ought to subordinate some desires to others. The others, which the moralist wishes to see supreme, are of two sorts. There is first the wish to please and to earn praise from our friends or from the authorities, or, if we live in the Italian Renaissance, posterity. But there is also another kind of desire, which is that involved in love or sympathy, which is the straightforward uncomplicated desire for the welfare of others. Almost everybody feels this in some degree. It is abnormal not to feel it towards one's children while they are young. Either of these two classes of desire tends to harmonize my interests with those of others. I define my interests as all the things that I desire, and therefore, in so far as I desire the welfare of others, this becomes part of my interests. Although, therefore, what determines my action is what *I* desire, and is in this sense egoistic, it is not necessarily egoistic as regards the objects desired.

I come now to the second question mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, namely, "where there are ethical disagreements, how shall we decide?" There are here various kinds of disagreement to be considered. Of the disagreements that occur in practice, much the greater number can be reduced to disagreements as to fact, and are therefore not essentially ethical. When Mr. A and Mr. B disagree, it may be possible to prove that the system upheld by Mr. B will bring more satisfaction to Mr. A than Mr. A's system will. I have heard it said, though I am not sure whether this is historically correct, that Quakers were the first people to adopt the plan of fixed prices in shops. It is said that they did this because they thought it a lie to ask more than you were willing to take. But fixed prices

proved such a convenience to customers that Quaker shopkeepers all grew rich, and the others found it advisable to follow suit. This is an example of a large class of cases in which real and apparent self-interest conflict, and the only people who act in harmony with real self-interest are those who have a moral principle compelling them to go against what they believe to be their interest. In such cases a better appreciation of fact would prevent ethical disagreement. People who are defeated in war very often believe themselves to be upholding some ethical principle, but if they had foreseen their defeat, they would have perceived that their principle, whether valid or not, would not be upheld by such means.

There are however some genuine purely ethical disagreements. The most important of these is as to vindictive punishment. When we hate a man and think him wicked, we are liable to find pleasure in the thought of his suffering, and we may easily persuade ourselves that this suffering is a good thing on its own account. This is the basis of the belief in Hell, where punishment is not supposed to have any reforming effect. Belief in vindictive punishment has also more mundane forms. When the Germans were defeated at the end of the First World War, there was a very wide-spread feeling that they ought to be punished, not only in order to reform them or in order to deter others from following their example, but also because it was just that such appalling sin should be followed by suffering. Undoubtedly this feeling helped to produce the folly of Versailles and the subsequent treatment of Germany. I do not know how to prove that vindictive punishment is a bad thing. There are, however, two kinds of argument which can be brought. One is that the whole conception of sin is mistaken, as I have argued in a previous chapter. The other is an argument from prudence. Versailles and its aftermath led to the Nazis and the Second World War. I think one may lay it down that in the great majority of cases vindictive punishment does not have the effects which are hoped for by those who inflict it,

but diminishes the total of satisfaction of desire, not only in those who are punished, but also in those who punish. This however is a large question leading straight into many vexed problems of politics. I shall therefore say no more about it at present.

Most of the disagreements that occur in practice are, not as to what things have intrinsic value, but as to who shall enjoy them. The holders of power naturally demand for themselves the lion's share. Disagreements of this sort tend to become mere contests for power. In theory, this sort of question can be decided by our general criterion: that system is best which produces a maximum of intrinsic value. Disputes may remain when both sides accept this criterion, but they will then have become disputes as to fact and will be, at least in theory, amenable to scientific treatment.

I will end this chapter by applying its principles to two questions that I have often found troublesome. The first of these is as to cruelty, and the second is as to the rights of the individual against society.

When I am compelled, as happens very frequently in the modern world, to contemplate acts of cruelty which make me shudder with horror, I find myself constantly impelled towards an ethical outlook which I cannot justify intellectually. I find myself thinking, "These men are wicked and what they do is bad in some absolute sense for which my theory has not provided". I believe, however, that this feeling does not do justice to the theory. Let us see what the theory permits. It is clear, to begin with, that acts of cruelty in general diminish the total satisfaction of mankind and are therefore such as, on our definition, ought not to be performed. It is clear, further, that the emotion of disapproval towards such acts tends to prevent them, and is therefore, on our definitions, such as ought to be felt. But at this point the kind of theory that I have been advocating exercises a useful restraint, which is absent from more absolute theories. It does not follow, because A is cruel, that

B is right to be cruel towards A. It follows only that he does right in trying to prevent A from committing further cruel acts. If, as may well happen, this is more likely to be effected by kindness than by punishment, then kindness is the better method. Doctor Burt (now Sir Cyril), in his book on the juvenile delinquent, begins with an account of a boy of seven who committed a murder. He was treated with kindness and became a decent citizen. It was not possible to apply this method to Hitler, and I do not wish to suggest that in his case it would have succeeded. But it is possible to apply it to the German nation. Such considerations, I maintain, show that our ethic justifies a proper horror of cruelty without justifying the excesses to which this horror often leads.

I come now to my last question, which concerns the rights of the individual as against society. Ethics, we said, is part of an attempt to make man more gregarious than nature made him. The stresses and strains with which morals are concerned are due, it may be said, to the only partial gregariousness of the human species. But this is a half-truth. Many of the things that are best in the human species are due to the fact that it is not completely gregarious. The individual has his own intrinsic value, and the best individuals make contributions to the general good which are not demanded, and are often even resented, by the rest of the herd. It is therefore an essential part of the pursuit of the general good to allow to individuals such freedoms as are not obviously injurious to others. It is this that gives rise to the perennial conflict of liberty and authority, and sets limits to the principle that authority is the source of virtue.

## CHAPTER XI

### *Production and Distribution*

WE shall be concerned in this chapter with matters in which the problems of ethics are almost indistinguishable from those of economics and politics. I shall henceforth assume as accepted the definitions of "intrinsic value" and "right conduct" arrived at in an earlier chapter, namely:

*Intrinsic value* is the property of a state of mind which is enjoyed or which, having been experienced, is desired. The opposite of intrinsic value is called intrinsic disvalue. A value and a disvalue are considered equal when a person who has the choice is indifferent as to whether he experiences both or neither.

*Right conduct* is conduct which maximizes the balance of value over disvalue or minimizes the balance of disvalue over value, the choice being among acts that are possible.

Right conduct, so defined, is not quite the same thing as moral conduct or virtuous conduct in the sense generally given to these terms. It includes moral conduct, but has a slightly larger scope. We do not, as a rule, say that a man is virtuous because he abstains from eating to excess, we merely say that he is sensible from a purely egoistic standpoint; whereas virtuous conduct, as generally understood, usually involves some non-egoistic element. There are, in fact, two different departments of ethics, one concerned with the production of intrinsic value and the other with distribution. Morality, except when it is superstitious, is mainly concerned with distribution. We decided in an earlier chapter that ethics is not concerned with the question, "Who enjoys what has intrinsic value?" but only with producing as great a quantity of intrinsic value as

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possible. This, however, is not the way that people's feelings work. We want intrinsic value for ourselves and for the people of whom we are fond. We may perhaps extend our feelings to all our compatriots, but it is only very few people who extend them to all mankind. It follows that the distribution of intrinsic value which people naturally desire is not impartial, and is therefore not at all likely to be what makes the total of intrinsic value as large as possible. Morality is to a very large extent an attempt to combat this partiality and to lead people in action to attach as much importance to the good of others as to their own.

There is much more disagreement about distribution than as to what constitutes intrinsic value. It is because there is so little disagreement as to intrinsic value that it is suitable as the fundamental concept of ethics. Let us endeavour to give concrete content to the conception of intrinsic value.

The first thing to observe is that intrinsic value does not belong to external objects in their own right, but only to their psychological effects. It is states of mind that have the quality in question, and the things that cause these states of mind do not have intrinsic value on their own account. They have value as means for those in whom they produce the desired results, but not for others. Oysters have value as means for those who like them, but not for those who do not. But, although there are some differences between different people as to the things that cause them to feel satisfaction, there is a very large measure of agreement, particularly where the simpler goods are concerned. Everybody requires the conditions of life and health, and most people require the conditions of biological survival. There have been ascetics who were happy, or said they were happy, with insufficient food and drink and shelter and clothing, but such men are rare, and statistically they may be ignored. Most people need for their happiness, in addition to the material conditions of life, a certain amount of friendly companionship, a certain minimum of security, and a sense of integration in some herd. All these needs are so nearly universal

that politics can ignore the few who can dispense with them. All these needs are at present very unevenly distributed. There are of course "higher" values, such as enjoyment of works of art or pleasure in intellectual activity, but these have not the primary importance of the more elementary needs.

Among the means to happiness there is an important division. There are those which, if enjoyed by A, are taken away from B; and there are others which do not have this quality of personal possession. As Iago says, "He that filches from me my good name, Robs me of that which not enriches him, And makes me poor indeed." A good name is not a thing like a loaf of bread which can be appropriated by a thief. So at least Iago said—but this is only partly true. People who are anxious to be admired are generally full of envy because they realize that there is a certain quantum of admiration to be distributed and that the admiration given to one man is apt to be lost by another. The same sort of considerations apply to every kind of eminence. If you wish to stand above your fellows in some respect, you may achieve your object by increasing your merits or by diminishing theirs, but it is logically impossible that everybody should enjoy pre-eminence. The sensations of a man who owns a Derby winner have intrinsic value, but of a sort which cannot be universalized. Short of a system of universal delusion, it is impossible that everybody should enjoy the delights of owning a Derby winner. We may therefore distinguish three kinds of sources of intrinsic value: First, goods in which there can be private ownership, but which can, at least in theory, be sufficiently supplied to everybody. Of these, the stock example is food. Second, goods which not only are private, but, by their logical character, are incapable of being generally enjoyed. These are those derived from pre-eminence, whether in fame or power or riches or what not. In theory, we might all be rich, but we cannot all be the richest man alive. Desires for pre-eminence, therefore, have a logically inescapable competitive character. Third, there are intrinsic



values of which the possession does nothing whatever to diminish the possibilities of equal enjoyments for others. In this category are such things as health, pleasure in being alive on a fine day, friendship, love, and the joys of creation.

The attitude of the moralist will be different in regard to these three classes. Let us begin with the first class, which consists broadly of material things such as economics deals with—food, clothes, houses, etc. We have first to ask ourselves whether there is an ethical principle that may be called "justice" which enables us to say that a "just" distribution of material goods has an intrinsic value. In our definition of right conduct we assumed that this is not the case, and that right conduct consists in producing as great a quantity of intrinsic value as possible, independently of who enjoys it. But it may be urged that a community in which intrinsic value is evenly distributed is better than one in which the distribution is uneven, even if the total quantity of intrinsic value is no greater. I do not myself believe this. I think that there are strong arguments for approximating to an even distribution, but I think they are all compatible with treating justice as a means rather than an end. The main objection to an uneven distribution is that it causes envy and hatred in the less fortunate, leading to fear and correlative hatred in the more fortunate. But where a long-established social system has so sanctioned an uneven distribution that even the less fortunate acquiesce without resentment, this argument does not apply. There are, moreover, in some societies positive arguments for inequality. I think therefore that, while the arguments for approximately equal distribution are very strong wherever an ancient tradition is not dominant, they are nevertheless arguments as to means, and I do not think that justice can be admitted as something having intrinsic value on its own account.

Although I think justice a means rather than an end, I think that, as a means, it is within limits exceedingly desirable. A very large part of conventional moral teaching is concerned

with curbing natural egoism. The prohibition of stealing, the command to love thy neighbour as thyself, the exhortations to self-sacrifice, and the praise of charity, all have this purpose. I am not sure that the traditional moral teaching which had this purpose adopted altogether the best technique, but that is another question. For my part, I am inclined to agree with Jeremy Bentham that the desired result is not likely to be achieved by moral exhortation, but rather by social institutions and a public opinion which make it, as far as possible, to each person's interest to act as the general interest demands. Bentham, as became his period, was a trifle too rationalistic and external in his devices for bringing about harmony between the public and the private interest. I should allow a larger part than he does to affection, instinctive sympathy, and ambitions that are useful rather than harmful. But I should agree that moral precepts alone are not likely to bring about a good result while the conflict between public and private interests remains sharp and obvious.

In regard to many of the goods belonging to our first class there would be no occasion for ethical considerations if political and economic institutions were better than they are. It would be easy, given such institutions, to provide enough food for everybody, in which case the whole matter of food distribution would be removed from the sphere of ethics. In this way, as in some others, the importance of moral action diminishes as the social system improves. In so far as the distribution of material goods is concerned, it could, in time, be reduced to the observation of well-established and not very irksome customs.

It is quite otherwise with our second class of intrinsic values—namely, those which are by their logical nature competitive. The most important of these is power. Almost everybody who is not exceptionally lazy desires more than his due share of power, if not in the world at large, at least in his immediate environment. Wars and revolutions, throughout history, have been caused mainly by love of power. In States where tyrants

are usually assassinated, there is, nevertheless, bloody competition for the post of tyrant. There has been, in the Western world, during the past few centuries, a very rapid decline in arbitrary power. Kings, slave-owners, husbands and fathers have been successively deposed, and there has been a serious attempt to equalize the distribution of ultimate power as far as possible. In this respect the claims of what may be called justice are very strong. Those who have power almost always abuse it. Although there are exceptions, they are rare.

Apart from moral exhortation, of which the efficacy is very limited, there are various ways of diminishing the evils due to excessive power. One of these is to facilitate resistance on the part of its victims. This is the method of democracy. Another is to educate in such a manner that acquired skills will lead the love of power into useful rather than harmful channels. Love of power, like other deep-seated impulses, cannot be wholly suppressed without great damage to those who, in consequence, feel thwarted, but it can easily be turned into directions in which it is generally beneficial. This is often, though not always, the case when what is sought is power over nature or knowledge of natural laws. It is also often, though not always, the case with the power over men's minds that is achieved by creative genius. In regard to power, as in other directions, the best ethical maxims are not ascetic, but consist rather in encouraging and providing outlets which are not destructive.

As regards our third class of goods—namely, those in which one man's possession does not interfere, of necessity, with that of another—there ought to be no problem of distribution, but, in fact, there is. The sort of goods that I am thinking of have a very wide range, from a child's joy in living to the most refined mental delights in the creation or enjoyment of works of genius. In so far as one person's enjoyment of such delights interferes with another's, this is due to remediable defects in the social system. Health, for example, ought to be nearly universal, but where work is excessive and medicine expensive it becomes the

prerogative of the well-to-do. George Lansbury induced the authorities in Poplar to improve medical care by raising the rates beyond what was legally permitted, and thereby diminished the infant death-rate. For this, he was sent to prison. All the good things that depend upon higher education are, at present, the prerogative of a minority; and so are those that depend upon considerable leisure. In such ways there is, at present, competition which is not essentially necessary, but the remedy lies in politics rather than in ethics.

There is one large question as to distribution on which I have not yet touched. It is the question of posterity. How much of present good should be sacrificed for the sake of future generations? It is difficult to refuse a certain sympathy with the Irishman who said, "Why should I do anything for posterity? It never did anything for me." Nevertheless, posterity has its claims. We are grateful to those who, in the past, planted avenues which they did not live to see full-grown. We have good reason to be concerned when soils are exhausted by unwise cultivation. We are far too careless of the world's mineral resources. We are even carrying pleasure in combat to the point where we seem to face with equanimity the possibility that we may exterminate the human race. In these ways ours is an unusually reckless age. It is reckless because everything is fluid and the future is uncertain. Until some stability is recovered, it is unlikely that men will give due thought to posterity.

This is a more serious matter than is sometimes thought. An individual cannot, without becoming sterile, confine his purview to his own life, nor even to his own country or his own age. Each of us is part of a long chain from our remote animal ancestry into an unforeseeable future. The human race has emerged slowly from the condition of a rare and miserable hunted animal, but if we suppose that it has no further journey to make, that there are no greater perfections to be achieved in the future, and that we are approaching a dead-end, something

deeply instinctive and immeasurably important will wither and die. I am thinking of something which in most people is scarcely conscious, something which acquires explicit expression only in a few, but which belongs to us in our inmost being, because we are not merely individuals but members of a species. It is for this reason that in judging of a country or a period I should attach importance, not only to the day-by-day happiness of the individuals concerned, but to its contribution to civilization, by which I mean the stock of all those mental goods which distinguish man from the ape and civilized man from the savage. It is these things that make the unique importance of man, and it is of these things that each generation in turn is the trustee. To hand on the treasure, not diminished, but increased, is our supreme duty to posterity. I wish I could believe that we are performing it.

## CHAPTER XII

### *Superstitious Ethics*

IN previous chapters it has been argued that the rightness or wrongness of an act depends upon its probable consequences, and not upon its belonging to some class of acts labelled virtuous or sinful without regard to their effects. It is possible to accept this view in the abstract without realizing how contrary it is to received usage. The word "ethics", and still more the adjective "unethical", commonly implies some mysterious and inexplicable quality which an act is known to possess in virtue either of a traditional tabu or of some supernatural revelation. This point of view governs the ethical judgments of most people and deeply affects criminal law. It is this point of view that I am calling "superstitious ethics".

Consider the following propositions:

- It is wicked to eat pork;
- it is wicked to eat beef;
- it is wicked for a widow to evade suttee;
- it is wicked to work on Saturdays;
- it is wicked to play on Sundays;
- it is wicked for two godparents of the same child to marry;
- it is wicked to marry one's deceased wife's sister, or one's deceased husband's brother;
- it is wicked to fornicate;
- it is wicked to have sexual relations with a member of one's own sex;
- it is wicked to commit suicide.

Each of these propositions has been fervently maintained by large and civilized communities. Some of them are embodied in

the criminal law of advanced countries. I am not concerned to argue whether such acts are or are not wicked. What I am concerned with are the reasons given for supposing them to be so. These reasons are derived in some cases from a tradition having a pre-historic origin, but in most cases they are derived from some sacred book which is considered so authoritative that its *dicta* must never be questioned. Most of the moral exhortation which is practised by the clergy or by those who give strengthening advice in the Y.M.C.A., is concerned with exhorting hearers to obey such precepts; and failure to obey them is viewed conventionally as much more heinous than unkindness, or malice inspired by envy, or group hatred leading to political disaster. A Victorian cotton manufacturer who employed women in his mills might work them for such long hours and for such miserable wages that their health was ruined and their lives were filled with anguish, but if he made enough money, he was respected, and might become a member of Parliament. If, however, it became known that he had had sexual relations with some one among the women in his employ, he was regarded as a sinner, and public honours were not for him. Professional moralists have never considered, and do not now consider, that kindness, generosity, freedom from envy and malice, are as important morally as obedience to the rules imposed by a traditional code. Indeed, a cynic might be tempted to think that one of the attractions of a traditional code is the opportunities which it affords for thinking ill of other people and for thwarting what should be innocent desires.

Support for this supposition may be derived from the curious selectiveness which characterizes the orthodox interpretation of texts. There are in the Gospels two pronouncements on divorce: one forbidding it altogether, the other permitting it for adultery. The Catholic Church and the great majority of Anglican clergymen reject the more humane of these two pronouncements.

A good example of the effect of superstitious ethics upon the law of England at the present day was afforded by the rejection

in the House of Lords, in 1936, of the Voluntary Euthanasia (Legalization) Bill. The purpose of this Bill was to permit doctors, with the consent of the patient, to shorten suffering in cases of incurable illness. There are large numbers of cases every year of patients who suffer intense agony, especially from cancer, and who have no hope of recovery. As the law stands, no medical man, and no relative of the patient, has any right to put any end to the suffering however much the patient may wish him to do so. The late Lord Ponsonby, in the above-mentioned Bill, proposed that, subject to elaborate safeguards, the patient and his doctors together should have the right to end his life somewhat sooner than it would end by nature. Their Lordships were profoundly shocked by this suggestion and rejected it by a large majority. Lord Fitzalan, who moved the rejection of the Bill, objected to its title, and said: "I wish he had given it good plain English words, understandable by the people, and called the bill what it is, a bill to legalize murder and suicide, because, after all, that is what it amounts to." He went on to say: "Of course, if this question is to be considered, as I am sure it will not be, by noble Lords in this House, as if there was no God, then the situation is different. Then we are driven back to being governed only by sentiment. Well, sentiment has its merits, and in many ways I think sentiment does much good. But if we allow it to run away with us, then it means an abandonment of principle, it means that we are governed by our emotions, and we sacrifice that great virtue of grit which has been such a great characteristic of our race. This is no party question. For generations the great majority of our predecessors in this House, of all creeds and all sections of opinion, have accepted the tradition that the Almighty reserved to Himself alone the power to decide the moment when life should become extinct. The Noble Lord opposite comes down today with his Bill and asks us to usurp this right to ourselves, to ignore the Almighty in this respect, to insist on sharing this prerogative."



Several comments occur to one in reading these arguments. There is no evidence that Lord Fitzalan was opposed to war or to capital punishment, although in each case human beings are usurping what he calls the privilege of the Almighty. It is only when killing is a kindness that he objects to it. And what should we have to think of a God who shared Lord Fitzalan's sentiments? Is it really credible that a wise, omnipotent, and beneficent Being finds so much pleasure in watching the slow agonies of an innocent person that He will be angry with those who shorten the ordeal? The House of Lords, encouraged by the late Archbishop of Canterbury, apparently took this view, though two medical Peers endeavoured to soften its cruelty by saying that, even with the law as it is, doctors do often shorten life in such cases in spite of the fact that in doing so they become legally liable to be hanged. This contention might have been put, more briefly than they put it, in the simple words: "hypocrisy at all costs".

I have dwelt upon this case of euthanasia both because it was debated in Parliament not very long ago, and because it raises no issue of politics. There is no question of rich against poor, conservative against labour, or any of the other issues on which elections are fought. The traditional moral code stands out stark and cruel and immovable against the claims of kindly feeling.

Some people may argue that opinion has become more liberal since 1936, and that, if a similar Bill were introduced now, it would be more likely to pass. It is perhaps a sufficient answer to point out that no similar Bill has been introduced. Probably one of the reasons is that there are a certain number of believers in traditional systems who would vote against any Member of Parliament if he supported such a Bill, but that there are very few people of liberal outlook who would desert their own political party because their Member or Candidate of that party had voted against euthanasia. Traditionalists hold their opinions more fanatically than their liberal-minded opponents,

and therefore have power out of proportion to their numbers. A man who publicly advocates any relaxation of the traditional code can be made to suffer obloquy, but nothing of the sort can be inflicted upon benighted bigots.

I can illustrate this from my own experience: In the year 1940, I had a letter from a young American liberal criticizing my book *Marriage and Morals* on the ground that everything said in that book is now accepted by practically everybody, and that the superstitions I was attacking are virtually extinct. A few weeks later, as a result of legal proceedings, I was deprived of a professorship in New York on the explicit ground that *Marriage and Morals* was "lecherous, lewd, lascivious and obscene". I was in consequence subjected for a time to an almost complete boycott throughout the United States.

It is of course true that public opinion in general is more liberal than it was, and this has had some effect upon legislation, for example, as regards divorce. On the other hand, police measures against homosexuals are being intensified in this country; and in New York State, where adultery is punishable by imprisonment, there is no effective movement to alter the law in this respect. Many people say: "What does the law matter, seeing that it is not enforced?" To my mind this is a very fallacious argument. In the first place, any law which cannot be enforced is bad, since it brings law into contempt. In the second place, although the law is usually not enforced, it can be invoked by a vindictive spouse or a political opponent, and can be used as a means of blackmail. For these reasons, among others, I cannot think that the official profession of an ethical standard that is neither obeyed nor believed in by the majority of the population is a matter which ought to be viewed with equanimity.

The main argument against superstitious ethics is that they come down to us from less civilized times and embody a harshness from which we should try to escape. Affection towards intimates and kindly feeling towards the world at large are the

sentiments most likely to lead to right conduct. Traditional precepts have quite other sources. Why is birth control wicked? Because the Lord struck Onan dead. Why is homosexuality wicked? Because the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Why is adultery wicked? Because of the Seventh Commandment. I am not saying that there may not be better reasons for some at least of these prohibitions. What I am saying is that the traditional reasons are invalid and should be forgotten.

There is another aspect of superstitious ethics which is very harmful. It is that which holds that people who do certain things are sinners and deserve to suffer. I am not suggesting that there should be no such thing as punishment or the criminal law. What I am saying is that punishment, where justifiable, is a regrettable necessity and not something to rejoice at as a just retribution. If a man arrives in London with the plague, he and all with whom he has had contact are isolated and subjected to various disagreeables. But we do not think that they are wicked, and we do not rejoice in whatever sufferings we have to inflict. It is not in this way that conventional moralists view "sinners". On the contrary, a belief in sin is held to justify those emotions of hatred to which most people are prone. This is especially disastrous when it is a whole nation or race or creed that is thought wicked. The world in which we live is filled with such collective hatreds; and it is they, more than anything else, that threaten mankind with disaster.

An ethical principle may be judged by the kind of emotion that causes it to be welcomed. By this test, it will be found that a great many generally recognized principles are not so respectable as they seem. A candid examination will often show that, whether a principle be valid or not, what makes men cling to it is that it affords an outlet for some not very noble passion, more especially cruelty, envy, and pleasure in feeling superiority. If, on self-examination, you find that it is passions of this sort that cause you to cling to some moral maxim, that is a quite sufficient reason for a re-examination of your

convictions in the matter. It is because superstitious ethics so often spring from such undesirable sources that it is worth while to combat them, and to accept only such moral rules as seem likely to promote the general happiness, and to reject all those which attract us because they cause unhappiness to those whom we dislike.

## CHAPTER XIII

### *Ethical Sanctions*

THE question with which we shall be concerned in this chapter is the following: What motives exist, or could be made to exist, to promote "right" conduct according to the ethic developed in previous chapters? I will repeat once more that I mean by "right" conduct, that conduct which will probably produce the greatest balance of satisfaction over dissatisfaction, or the smallest balance of dissatisfaction over satisfaction, and that, in making this estimate, the question as to who enjoys the satisfaction, or suffers the dissatisfaction, is to be considered irrelevant. A few words of explanation are called for. I say "satisfaction" rather than "pleasure" or "interest". The term "interest" as commonly employed has too narrow a connotation. We should not say that a man is acting from self-interest if, from an impulse of benevolence, he gives his money to charity, but he may still, if he has a generous disposition, derive more satisfaction from this act than from a miserly clinging to his possessions. The term "satisfaction" is wide enough to embrace everything that comes to a man through the realization of his desires, and these desires do not necessarily have any connection with self, except that oneself feels them. One may, for instance, desire—I do myself—that a proof should be discovered for Fermat's last theorem, and one may be glad if a brilliant young mathematician is given a sufficient grant to enable him to seek a proof. The gratification that one would feel in this case comes under the head of satisfaction, but hardly of self-interest as commonly understood.

Satisfaction, as I mean the word, is not quite the same thing as pleasure, although it is intimately connected with it. Some

experiences have a satisfying quality which goes beyond their mere pleasurable-ness; others, on the contrary, although very pleasurable, do not have that peculiar feeling of fulfilment which I am calling satisfaction.

Many philosophers have maintained that men always and invariably seek pleasure, and that even the apparently most altruistic acts have this end in view. This, I think, is a mistake. It is true, of course, that, whatever you may desire, you will get a certain pleasure when your object is achieved, but often the pleasure is due to the desire, not the desire to the expected pleasure. This applies especially to the simplest desires, such as hunger and thirst. Satisfying hunger or thirst is a pleasure, but the desire for food or drink is direct, and is not, except in a gourmet, a desire for the pleasure which they afford.

It is customary among moralists to urge what is called "unselfishness" and to represent morality as consisting mainly of self-abnegation. This view, it seems to me, springs from a failure to realize the wide scope of possible desires. Few people's desires are wholly concentrated upon themselves. Of this there is abundant evidence in the prevalence of life-insurance. Every man, of necessity, is actuated by his own desires, whatever they may be, but there is no reason why his desires should all be self-centred. Nor is it always the case that desires concerned with other people will lead to better actions than those that are more egoistic. A painter, for example, may be led by family affection to paint pot-boilers, but it might be better for the world if he painted masterpieces and let his family suffer the discomforts of comparative poverty. It must be admitted, however, that the immense majority of mankind have a bias in favour of their own satisfactions, and that one of the purposes of morality is to diminish the strength of this bias.

In this respect conventional moralists, whose system has a theological basis, consider themselves in a much stronger position than those who adopt some such system as I have been advocating. Locke, for example, is able to get completely

satisfactory results by a straightforward appeal to unadulterated egoism. He thinks that those who do right go to Heaven and those who do wrong go to Hell. It follows that the prudent egoist will do right. Prudence therefore is the only virtue that Locke thinks necessary. Bentham, who no longer believed in Heaven and Hell, thought that good institutions here on earth could have much the same effect. Criminals were to be incarcerated in his panopticon, which radiated from a centre and had a skilfully devised system of mirrors so that the head gaoler, like a spider in the middle of his web, could view simultaneously all that the criminals were doing. The head gaoler in this system replaced the Eye of God. When criminals did right, they were rewarded; when they did wrong, they were punished. Consequently---so Bentham maintained---they would all do right. Unfortunately, even if he had obtained all the support for his panopticon that in his most optimistic moments he hoped for, there would still have been people not in prison, and for them other arrangements would have been necessary. Nor is it quite clear why the head gaoler should be virtuous. It cannot be said, therefore, that Bentham's substitute for theological sanctions is wholly satisfactory.

Religious sanctions, although in theory they may seem adequate, have not been found so in practice. Prudence is about as difficult as any other virtue, and it is to prudence, as we have seen, that Locke appeals. In the Ages of Faith, when men really believed that mortal sin, not followed by absolution, would lead to Hell, murder and rape were much commoner than they are in the Western World at the present day, as anybody may see by reading any mediaeval chronicle. Men who are fierce and impulsive will, under the influence of passion, behave in imprudent ways, however obvious the imprudence might be to them in calmer moments. Modern theologians, by softening the dogma of Eternal Damnation, have very much diminished the force of the old sanctions; and even those who still accept them know that there are ways of circumventing

them. I once in a train got into conversation with an Irish-American politician, a man of exemplary devoutness and a good son of the Church. He assured me, with increasing fervour as he drank his whisky, that he had the greatest affection for his wife and children, but never neglected opportunities for surreptitious fornication, for which, in due course, he would obtain absolution. No one can deny that such cases are extremely common. It would seem therefore that the old sanctions are largely ineffective even in the matters on which they lay most stress.

There is, in fact, no method by which we can make sure that everybody will always be virtuous. The question of sanctions is therefore quantitative. Some systems produce more virtue, and some less; some ethical doctrines are more conducive to socially desirable conduct, and others less. Broadly speaking, one may say that the object of the moralist and of the politician should be to produce the greatest possible conformity of individual and general satisfaction, so that as far as may be the acts to which a man is prompted by pursuit of his own satisfaction are those which bring satisfaction to others. How far such conformity will exist in any given society depends upon various factors, of which three may be singled out as specially important. They are: (a) the social system; (b) the nature of individual desires; and (c) the canons of praise and blame. Of these three, the social system is probably the most important. It is obvious that people behave differently in an anarchic community, such as a mining town during a gold-rush, from the way in which they behave in a community where the criminal law is effective and well established. It is obvious also that different communities offer different opportunities for personal success. If you are one of a gang of pirates, the methods by which you become their leader are quite different from those which you must pursue if you are a Fellow of a College and wish to become its Head. In a well ordered community, personal success will be the reward of actions that are



generally useful; whereas, in an anarchic community, they will be the reward of cunning, brutality and quick violence. But this is a large subject which I will not pursue further at present.

Individual desires, which determine individual conduct, can themselves be modified to a very great extent by education, fashion, and opportunity. It is clear that such modification, in so far as it is deliberate, should be in the direction of making individual desires as far as possible in conformity with the general good. To a very great extent this happens in all civilized communities. The butcher and the baker minister to my happiness, not because they love me, but because the economic system makes what serves me useful to them. There are however in every community a greater or smaller number of people who are actuated by socially undesirable motives of hatred, or anger, or envy, or direct impulse to violence. It should be the business of psychologists and others to ascertain the causes of anti-social impulses and to endeavour to remove them. This is a matter to be treated by the methods of the scientist, rather than by those of the traditional moralist. Traditional moralists have believed too much in the efficacy of preaching and explicit exhortation, and too little in the scientific investigation of psychological causation. This has been bound up with an undue emphasis upon sin and free-will. Many character defects are as little to be cured by preaching as are bodily ailments. It is difficult to set limits to what could be done in the way of moral improvement of individuals if the matter were studied with the same care and in the same spirit with which the medical profession studies physical health.

Praise and blame as allotted by public opinion have an enormous effect upon conduct, but this effect is by no means always good. Napoleon was admired, not only by the French, but by many people in the nations which he conquered, such as the Germans and Italians. What applies to such men in an eminent degree, applies in lesser measure to lesser men. Forms of success which are not socially useful are praised, and wherever

a superstitious ethic exists acts which do no harm are apt to be blamed.

In all these ways, ethical sanctions may be better or worse. In all these ways they are very powerful. Given good institutions, and a socially desirable ethic, and a scientific understanding of the training of individual character, it would be possible for conflicts between individual and general satisfaction to become very rare. To secure this result should be the supreme aim of those who endeavour to create a happy human society.

In Western communities as they exist at the present day a very considerable measure of harmony between individual and general satisfactions has already been achieved, so long as we confine ourselves to the internal affairs of the community and ignore its relations to possibly hostile countries. The first step in producing this harmony is the criminal law, which makes it against the interests of all but a very few individuals to indulge in such activities as murder and theft. The next most important factor is the necessity to earn a living. As a general rule people are not paid for work unless it is thought useful, and work covers a large part of most men's days. The next factor in promoting what a community considers good behaviour is the awarding of praise and blame. People like to be admired and do not like to be hated. This motive, however, as we have already seen, may have bad effects if the standards by which the community awards praise and blame are inadequate or mistaken.

Apart from these ways in which self-regarding motives can be made generally useful, there are in most human beings direct impulses concerned with other people. These may be impulses of hate, and then in all likelihood do harm. But such motives as family affection and friendship are common except in times of very unusual stress. There is also, more commonly I think than is sometimes realized, a motive of general benevolence, which comes to the fore in times of large natural disasters

such as floods and earthquakes. And lastly, though this is as apt to be bad in its effects as to be good, there is pride in one's group—family or city or nation or whatever it may be. These motives are quite as much part of ordinary human nature as the purely self-regarding motives.

For the above reasons most people in the better communities of the present day are already engaged, as regards most of their activities, in ways that are useful to others as well as to themselves. This is not because the moral law enjoins unselfishness, but because, given the society in which they live, it is the way in which their impulses and desires prompt them to act. It is clear that better institutions, better education of the emotions, and a better apportioning of praise and blame, would increase the already considerable extent to which people's actions further the well-being of their community. It is to such causes, rather than to a revived belief in supernatural sanctions, that we must look for ethical progress.



## PART TWO .

# THE CONFLICT OF PASSIONS



## CHAPTER I

### *From Ethics to Politics*

THE somewhat abstract ethical considerations with which we have been concerned in preceding chapters might make it seem, if put before a person ignorant of human history, as if the road to universal contentment were easy and obvious. It is only necessary that the desires actuating the conduct of individuals and groups should be compossible desires and not such as, by their very nature, involve the thwarting of others. It would not be by any means impossible to secure that this should be so, apart from comparatively unimportant exceptions. Men's desires are not an immutable datum. They are affected by circumstances and education and opportunity. With the skills that we at present possess, and by the diffusion of the knowledge possessed by economists and sociologists, the more destructive passions could be relegated to a position no more important than that occupied at present by the passions which lead men to private murder. If this were done, the whole world could before long achieve a measure of contentment and a general diffusion of happiness such as has not been known since organized society began.

But in the real world things are different from this. The springs of action, as they are to be found in history and in the present day, are very largely such as demand defeat for others. There is love of power, there is rivalry, there is hate, and, I am afraid we must add, a positive pleasure in the spectacle of suffering. These passions are so strong that they have not only governed the behaviour of societies, but have caused hatred of those who spoke against them. When Christ told men that they should love each other, He produced such fury that the

mob shouted, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Christians ever since have followed the mob rather than the Founder of their religion. Nor have those who are not Christians been in any way behind-hand. Malenkov and Senator McCarthy are both carrying on the good work in the spirit of the mob which demanded the Crucifixion. Intelligence has been used, not to tame the passions, but to give them scope. From the earliest beginnings of civilization, there has been slavery inflicted by the powerful upon the weak. In almost all peasant communities the hard work is left to women, not because they are more fit to do it than men, but solely because they have less muscle and are therefore less fit. Throughout past history power has been used to give to the strong an undue share of good things and to leave to the weak a life of toil and misery.

Rivalry has been equally disastrous. I am not thinking of its humbler forms in individual competition for wealth and social eminence. I am thinking, rather, of the rivalry between organized groups which is the source of war. •

It cannot be said that the world as a whole has improved in regard to these matters. While men were few and social organization had not yet crystallized, there was hunger, and there was danger from wild beasts, but, until forethought had become a habit, happiness was possible at the times when hunger and danger were not present. As society became more organized, the intervals of careless happiness became for the majority more and more rare. I do not think that the sum of human misery has ever in the past been as great as during the last twenty-five years. There was the Nazi campaign for the extermination of Jews, there was the extermination by starvation of millions of Russian peasants, there were the great purges, and there are the vast camps of forced labour. And, as if this were not enough, the last few years have seen the extension of the same system to China. It can hardly be pretended that the Western Nations are redressing the balance by an increase of happiness, for there hangs over them all the



dreadful threat of a war conducted by means of atomic and hydrogen bombs and with all the new refinements of cruelty that modern prison-camps have introduced.

The study of history from the building of the pyramids to the present day is not encouraging for any humane person. At various times there have been men who saw what was good, but they did not succeed in altering the pattern of human behaviour. Buddha, as much as Christ, taught universal love, but in the end the inhabitants of India preferred Siva. St. Francis was gentle in his doctrines, but his immediate disciples became recruiting sergeants in a very savage war. There is so strong a tendency in human nature towards the fiercer passions that those who oppose them almost always incur hatred, and that whole systems of morals and theology are invented to make people feel that savagery is noble.

Such considerations make the application of ethics to politics difficult—so difficult as to seem at times almost futile. But we have reached a moment in human history in which, for the first time, the mere continued existence of the human race has come to depend upon the extent to which human beings can learn to be swayed by ethical considerations. If we continue to allow scope to destructive passions, our increasing skill must bring us all to disaster. One must therefore hope, with as much confidence as one can muster, that even on the brink of final and utter catastrophe mankind will pause to reflect, and to realize that perhaps even the well being of those whom we hate would not be too high a price to pay for our own continued existence.

It is not as if the destructive passions brought real happiness. Slave owners lived in dread of servile insurrections, rival armed nations are obsessed by the fear of defeat in war. All who profit by injustice have to curb their more generous emotions, and remain ignorant of some of the greatest joys that human life has to offer.

In the following chapters, which will be concerned with the

conflict of organized passions since civilization began and with the loss of happiness that this conflict has brought, we shall have to consider why men have hitherto used their intelligence to make a world that only a few could enjoy and that, to most, involved a life much more miserable than that of wild animals. Until we understand why this has been so, we cannot hope to find any way of making ethical doctrines effective. Whatever in the following chapters may seem gloomy or liable to produce discouragement has as its sole purpose the discovery of ways by which mankind can be induced to allow itself to be happy. The problem should not be insoluble, for, after all, the main appeal can be to self-interest. There are very few who are the happier for what is wrong with the world. Among those few, it is true, there are some who have great power; but they have power largely because men are blind. It is intelligence, accepting our passions as unalterable, which has brought the world into its present perilous condition. But our passions are not unalterable. Less skill is required to alter them than has been expended on the transmutation of elements. I cannot bring myself to believe that the human race, which has in some directions shown such extraordinary skill, is in other directions so unalterably stupid as to insist upon its own torment and destruction. Our age is gloomy, but perhaps the very fears that it inspires may become a source of wisdom. If this is to happen, mankind must, throughout the dangerous years to come, avoid yielding to despair, and keep alive the hope of a future far better than anything in the past. This is not impossible. It can be done if men choose to do it.

## CHAPTER II

### *Politically Important Desires*

I WILL begin the discussion of political theory with this subject because I think that most current discussions of politics and political theory take insufficient account of psychology. Economic facts, population statistics, constitutional organization, and so on, are set forth minutely. There is no difficulty in finding out how many South Koreans and how many North Koreans there were when the Korean War began. If you will look into the right books you will be able to ascertain what was their average income per head, and what were the sizes of their respective armies. But if you want to know what sort of person a Korean is, and whether there is any appreciable difference between a North Korean and a South Korean; if you wish to know what they respectively want out of life, what are their discontents, what their hopes and what their fears; in a word, what it is that, as they say, "makes them tick", you will look through the reference books in vain. And so you cannot tell whether the South Koreans are enthusiastic about UNO, or would prefer union with their cousins in the North. Nor can you guess whether they are willing to forgo land reform for the privilege of voting for some politician they have never heard of. It is neglect of such questions by the eminent men who sit in remote capitals, that so frequently causes disappointment. If politics is to become scientific, and if the event is not to be constantly surprising, it is imperative that our political thinking should penetrate more deeply into the springs of human action. What is the influence of hunger upon slogans? How does their effectiveness fluctuate with the number of calories in your diet? If one man offers you democracy and

another offers you a bag of grain, at what stage of starvation will you prefer the grain to the vote? Such questions are far too little considered. However, let us, for the present, forget the Koreans, and consider the human race.

All human activity is prompted by desire or impulse. There is a wholly fallacious theory advanced by some earnest moralists to the effect that it is possible to resist desire in the interests of duty and moral principle. I say this is fallacious, not because no man ever acts from a sense of duty, but because duty has no hold on him unless he desires to be dutiful. If you wish to know what men will do, you must know not only, or principally, their material circumstances, but rather the whole system of their desires with their relative strengths.

There are some desires which, though very powerful, have not, as a rule, any great *political* importance. Most men at some period of their lives desire to marry, but as a rule they can satisfy this desire without having to take any political action. There are, of course, exceptions; the rape of the Sabine women is a case in point. And the development of Northern Australia is seriously impeded by the fact that the vigorous young men who ought to do the work dislike being wholly deprived of female society. But such cases are unusual, and in general the interest that men and women take in each other has little influence upon politics.

The desires that are politically important may be divided into a primary and a secondary group. In the primary group come the necessities of life: food and shelter and clothing. When these things become very scarce, there is no limit to the efforts that men will make, or to the violence that they will display, in the hope of securing them. It is said by students of the earliest history that, on four separate occasions, drought in Arabia caused the population of that country to overflow into surrounding regions, with immense effects political, cultural and religious. The last of these four occasions was the rise of Islam. The gradual spread of Germanic tribes from Southern Russia

to England, and thence to San Francisco, had similar motives. Undoubtedly the desire for food has been, and still is, one of the main causes of great political events.

But man differs from other animals in one very important respect, and that is that he has some desires which are, so to speak, infinite, which can never be fully gratified, and which would keep him restless even in Paradise. The boa constrictor, when he has had an adequate meal, goes to sleep, and does not wake until he needs another meal. Human beings, for the most part, are not like this. When the Arabs, who had been used to living sparingly on a few dates, acquired the riches of the Eastern Roman Empire, and dwelt in palaces of almost unbelievable luxury, they did not, on that account, become inactive. Hunger could no longer be a motive, for Greek slaves supplied them with exquisite viands at the slightest nod. But other desires kept them active: four in particular, which we can label acquisitiveness, rivalry, vanity, and love of power.

Acquisitiveness—the wish to possess as much as possible of goods, or the title to goods—is a motive which, I suppose, has its origin in a combination of fear with the desire for necessities. I once befriended two little girls from Esthonia, who had narrowly escaped death from starvation in a famine. They lived in my family, and of course had plenty to eat. But they spent all their leisure visiting neighbouring farms and stealing potatoes, which they hoarded. Rockefeller, who in his infancy had experienced great poverty, spent his adult life in a similar manner. Similarly the Arab chieftains on their silken Byzantine divans could not forget the desert, and hoarded riches far beyond any possible physical need. But whatever may be the psychoanalysis of acquisitiveness, no one can deny that it is one of the great motives—especially among the more powerful, for, as I said before, it is one of the infinite motives. However much you may acquire, you will always wish to acquire more; satiety is a dream which will always elude you.

But acquisitiveness, although it is the mainspring of the

capitalist system, is by no means the most powerful of the motives that survive the conquest of hunger. Rivalry is a much stronger motive. Over and over again in Mohammedan history, dynasties have come to grief because the sons of a sultan by different mothers could not agree, and in the resulting civil war universal ruin resulted. The same sort of thing happens in modern Europe. When the British Government very unwisely allowed the Kaiser to be present at a naval review at Spithead, the thought which arose in his mind was not the one which we had intended. What he thought was: "I must have a Navy as good as Grandmamma's". And from this thought have sprung all our subsequent troubles. The world would be a happier place than it is if acquisitiveness were always stronger than rivalry. But in fact, a great many men will cheerfully face impoverishment if they can thereby secure complete ruin for their rivals. Hence the present level of taxation.

Vanity is a motive of immense potency. Anyone who has much to do with children knows how they are constantly performing some antic, and saying "Look at me". "Look at me" is one of the most fundamental desires of the human heart. It can take innumerable forms, from buffoonery to the pursuit of posthumous fame. There was a Renaissance Italian princeling who was asked by the priest on his deathbed if he had anything to repent of. "Yes", he said. "There is one thing. On one occasion I had a visit from the Emperor and the Pope simultaneously. I took them to the top of my tower to see the view, and I neglected the opportunity to throw them both down, which would have given me immortal fame." History does not relate whether the priest gave him absolution. One of the troubles about vanity is that it grows with what it feeds on. The more you are talked about, the more you will wish to be talked about. The condemned murderer who is allowed to see the account of his trial in the Press is indignant if he finds a newspaper which has reported it inadequately. And the more he finds about himself in other newspapers, the more indignant

he will be with the one whose reports are meagre. Politicians and literary men are in the same case. And the more famous they become, the more difficult the press cutting agency finds it to satisfy them. It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the influence of vanity throughout the range of human life, from the child of three to the potentate at whose frown the world trembles. Mankind have even committed the impiety of attributing similar desires to the Deity, whom they imagine avid for continual praise.

But great as is the influence of the motives we have been considering, there is one which outweighs them all. I mean the love of power. Love of power is closely akin to vanity, but it is not by any means the same thing. What vanity needs for its satisfaction is glory, and it is easy to have glory without power. The people who enjoy the greatest glory in the United States are film stars, but they can be put in their place by the Committee for Un-American Activities, which enjoys no glory whatever. In England, the King has more glory than the Prime Minister, but the Prime Minister has more power than the King. Many people prefer glory to power, but on the whole these people have less effect upon the course of events than those who prefer power to glory. When Blücher, in 1814, saw Napoleon's palaces, he said: "Wasn't he a fool to have all this and to go running after Moscow." Napoleon, who certainly was not destitute of vanity, preferred power when he had to choose. To Blücher, this choice seemed foolish. Power, like vanity, is insatiable. Nothing short of omnipotence could satisfy it completely. And as it is especially the vice of energetic men, the causal efficacy of love of power is out of all proportion to its frequency. It is, indeed, by far the strongest motive in the lives of important men.

Love of power is greatly increased by the experience of power, and this applies to petty power as well as to that of potentates. In the happy days before 1914, when well-to-do ladies could acquire a host of servants, their pleasure in

exercising power over the domestics steadily increased with age. Similarly, in any autocratic régime, the holders of power become increasingly tyrannical with experience of the delights that power can afford. Since power over human beings is shown in making them do what they would rather not do, the man who is actuated by love of power is more apt to inflict pain than to permit pleasure. If you ask your boss for leave of absence from the office on some legitimate occasion, his love of power will derive more satisfaction from a refusal than from a consent. If you require a building permit, the petty official concerned will obviously get more pleasure from saying "No" than from saying "Yes". It is this sort of thing which makes the love of power such a dangerous motive.

But it has other sides which are more desirable. The pursuit of knowledge is, I think, mainly actuated by love of power. And so are all advances in scientific technique. In politics, also, a reformer may have just as strong a love of power as a despot. It would be a complete mistake to decry love of power altogether as a motive. Whether you will be led by this motive to actions which are useful, or to actions which are pernicious, depends upon the social system, and upon your capacities. If your capacities are theoretical or technical, you will contribute to knowledge or technique, and, as a rule, your activity will be useful. If you are a politician you *may* be actuated by love of power, but as a rule this motive will join itself on to the desire to see some state of affairs realized which, for some reason, you prefer to the *status quo*. A great general may, like Alcibiades, be quite indifferent as to which side he fights on, but most generals have preferred to fight for their own country, and have, therefore, had other motives besides love of power. The politician may change sides so frequently as to find himself always in the majority, but most politicians have a preference for one party to the other, and subordinate their love of power to this preference. Love of power as nearly pure as possible is to be seen in various different types of men. One type is the



soldier of fortune, of whom Napoleon is the supreme example. Napoleon had, I think, no ideological preference for France over Corsica, but if he had become Emperor of Corsica he would not have been so great a man as he became by pretending to be a Frenchman. Such men, however, are not quite pure examples, since they also derive immense satisfaction from vanity. The purest type is that of the *Eminence Grise*—the power behind the throne that never appears in public, and merely hugs itself with the secret thought: "How little these puppets know who is pulling the strings." Baron Holstein, who controlled the foreign policy of the German Empire from 1890 to 1906, illustrates this type to perfection. He lived in a slum; he never appeared in society; he avoided meeting the Emperor, except on one single occasion when the Emperor's importunity could not be resisted; he refused all invitations to Court functions, on the ground that he possessed no court dress. He had acquired secrets which enabled him to blackmail the Chancellor and many of the Kaiser's intimates. He used the power of blackmail, not to acquire wealth, or fame, or any other obvious advantage, but merely to compel the adoption of the foreign policy he preferred. In the East, similar characters were not very uncommon among eunuchs.

I come now to other motives which, though in a sense less fundamental than those we have been considering, are still of considerable importance. The first of these is love of excitement. Human beings show their superiority to the brutes by their capacity for boredom, though I have sometimes thought, in examining the apes at the Zoo, that they, perhaps, have the rudiments of this tiresome emotion. However that may be, experience shows that escape from boredom is one of the really powerful desires of almost all human beings. When white men first effect contact with some unspoiled race of savages, they offer them all kinds of benefits, from the light of the Gospel to pumpkin pie. These, however, much as we may regret it, most savages receive with indifference. What they really value

among the gifts that we bring to them is intoxicating liquor, which enables them, for the first time in their lives, to have the illusion, for a few brief moments, that it is better to be alive than dead. Red Indians, while they were still unaffected by white men, would smoke their pipes, not calmly as we do, but orgiastically, inhaling so deeply that they sank into a faint. And when excitement by means of nicotine failed, a patriotic orator would stir them up to attack a neighbouring tribe, which would give them all the enjoyment that we (according to our temperament) derive from a horse race or a General Election. The pleasure of gambling consists almost entirely in excitement. Monsieur Huc describes Chinese traders at the Great Wall in winter, gambling until they have lost all their cash, then proceeding to lose all their merchandise, and at last gambling away their clothes and going out naked to die of cold. With civilized men, as with primitive Red Indian tribes, it is, I think, chiefly love of excitement which makes the populace applaud when war breaks out; the emotion is exactly the same as at a football match, although the results are sometimes somewhat more serious.

It is not altogether easy to decide what is the root cause of the love of excitement. I incline to think that our mental make-up is adapted to the stage when men lived by hunting. When a man spent a long day with very primitive weapons in stalking a deer with the hope of dinner, and when, at the end of the day, he dragged the carcass triumphantly to his cave, he sank down in contented weariness, while his wife dressed and cooked the meat. He was sleepy, and his bones ached, and the smell of cooking filled every nook and cranny of his consciousness. At last, after eating, he sank into deep sleep. In such a life there was neither time nor energy for boredom. But when he took to agriculture, and made his wife do all the heavy work in the fields, he had time to reflect upon the vanity of human life, to invent mythologies and systems of philosophy, and to dream of the life hereafter in which he would perpetually

hunt the wild boar of Valhalla. Our mental make-up is suited to a life of very severe physical labour. I used, when I was younger, to take my holidays walking. I would cover twenty-five miles a day, and when the evening came I had no need of anything to keep me from boredom, since the delight of sitting amply sufficed. But modern life cannot be conducted on these physically strenuous principles. A great deal of work is sedentary, and most manual work exercises only a few specialized muscles. When crowds assemble in Trafalgar Square to cheer to the echo an announcement that the government has decided to have them killed, they would not do so if they had all walked twenty-five miles that day. This cure for bellicosity is, however, impracticable, and if the human race is to survive—a thing which is, perhaps, undesirable—other means must be found for securing an innocent outlet for the unused physical energy that produces love of excitement. This is a matter which has been too little considered, both by moralists and by social reformers. The social reformers are of the opinion that they have more serious things to consider. The moralists, on the other hand, are immensely impressed with the seriousness of all the permitted outlets of the love of excitement; the seriousness, however, in their minds, is that of Sin. Dance halls, cinemas, this age of jazz, are all, if we may believe our ears, gateways to Hell, and we should be better employed sitting at home contemplating our sins. I find myself unable to be in entire agreement with the grave men who utter these warnings. The devil has many forms, some designed to deceive the young, some designed to deceive the old and serious. If it is the devil that tempts the young to enjoy themselves, is it not, perhaps, the same personage that persuades the old to condemn their enjoyment? And is not condemnation perhaps merely a form of excitement appropriate to old age? And is it not, perhaps, a drug which—like opium—has to be taken in continually stronger doses to produce the desired effect? Is it not to be feared that, beginning with the wickedness of the cinema, we

should be led step by step to condemn the opposite political party, dagoes, wops, Asiatics, and, in short, everybody except the fellow members of our club? And it is from just such condemnations, when widespread, that wars proceed. I have never heard of a war that proceeded from dance halls.

What is serious about excitement is that so many of its forms are destructive. It is destructive in those who cannot resist excess in alcohol or gambling. It is destructive when it takes the form of mob violence. And above all it is destructive when it leads to war. It is so deep a need that it will find harmful outlets of this kind unless innocent outlets are at hand. There are such innocent outlets at present in sport, and in politics so long as it is kept within constitutional bounds. But these are not sufficient, especially as the kind of politics that is most exciting is also the kind that does most harm. Civilized life has grown altogether too tame, and, if it is to be stable, it must provide harmless outlets for the impulses which our remote ancestors satisfied in hunting. In Australia, where people are few and rabbits are many, I watched a whole populace satisfying the primitive impulse in the primitive manner by the skilful slaughter of many thousands of rabbits. But in London or New York, where people are many and rabbits are few, some other means must be found to gratify primitive impulse. I think every big town should contain artificial waterfalls that people could descend in very fragile canoes, and they should contain bathing pools full of mechanical sharks. Any person found advocating a preventive war should be condemned to two hours a day with these ingenious monsters. More seriously, pains should be taken to provide constructive outlets for the love of excitement. Nothing in the world is more exciting than a moment of sudden discovery or invention, and many more people are capable of experiencing such moments than is sometimes thought.

Interwoven with many other political motives are two closely related passions to which human beings are regrettably prone:

I mean fear and hate. It is normal to hate what we fear, and it happens frequently, though not always, that we fear what we hate. I think it may be taken as the rule among primitive men, that they both fear and hate whatever is unfamiliar. They have their own herd, originally a very small one. And within one herd, all are friends, unless there is some special ground of enmity. Other herds are potential or actual enemies; a single member of one of them who strays by accident will be killed. An alien herd as a whole will be avoided or fought according to circumstances. It is this primitive mechanism which still controls our instinctive reaction to foreign nations. The completely untravelled person will view all foreigners as the savage regards a member of another herd. But the man who has travelled, or who has studied international politics, will have discovered that, if his herd is to prosper, it must, to some degree, become amalgamated with other herds. If you are English and someone says to you: "The French are your brothers", your first instinctive feeling will be. "Nonsense, they shrug their shoulders, and talk French. And I am even told that they eat frogs." If he explains to you that we may have to fight the Russians, that, if so, it will be desirable to defend the line of the Rhine, and that, if the line of the Rhine is to be defended, the help of the French is essential, you will begin to see what he means when he says that the French are your brothers. But if some fellow-traveller were to go on to say that the Russians also are your brothers, he would be unable to persuade you, unless he could show that we are in danger from the Martians. We love those who hate our enemies, and if we had no enemies there would be very few people whom we should love.

All this, however, is only true so long as we are concerned solely with attitudes toward other human beings. You might regard the soil as your enemy because it yields reluctantly a niggardly subsistence. You might regard Mother Nature in general as your enemy, and envisage human life as a struggle

to get the better of Mother Nature. If men viewed life in this way, co-operation of the whole human race would become easy. And men could easily be brought to view life in this way if schools, newspapers, and politicians devoted themselves to this end. But schools are out to teach patriotism; newspapers are out to stir up excitement; and politicians are out to get re-elected. None of the three, therefore, can do anything towards saving the human race from reciprocal suicide.

There are two ways of coping with fear: one is to diminish the external danger, and the other is to cultivate Stoic endurance. The latter can be reinforced, except where immediate action is necessary, by turning our thoughts away from the cause of fear. The conquest of fear is of very great importance. Fear is in itself degrading; it easily becomes an obsession; it produces hate of that which is feared, and it leads headlong to excesses of cruelty. Nothing has so beneficent an effect on human beings as security. If an international system could be established which would remove the fear of war, the improvement in the everyday mentality of everyday people would be enormous and very rapid. Fear, at present, overshadows the world. The atom bomb and the bacterial bomb, wielded by the wicked communist or the wicked capitalist as the case may be, makes Washington and the Kremlin tremble, and drives men further and further along the road towards the abyss. If matters are to improve, the first and essential step is to find a way of diminishing fear. The world at present is obsessed by the conflict of rival ideologies, and one of the apparent causes of conflict is the desire for the victory of our own ideology and the defeat of the other. I do not think that the fundamental motive here has much to do with ideologies. I think the ideologies are merely a way of grouping people, and that the passions involved are merely those which always arise between rival groups. There are, of course, various reasons for hating communists. First and foremost, we believe that they wish to take away our property. But so do burglars, and although we

disapprove of burglars, our attitude towards them is very different indeed from our attitude towards communists—chiefly because they do not inspire the same degree of fear. Secondly, we hate the communists because they are irreligious. But the Chinese have been irreligious since the eleventh century, and we only began to hate them when they turned out Chiang Kai-shek. Thirdly, we hate the communists because they do not believe in democracy, but we consider this no reason for hating Franco. Fourthly, we hate them because they do not allow liberty; this we feel so strongly that we have decided to imitate them. It is obvious that none of these are the real grounds for our hatred. We hate them because we fear them and they threaten us. If the Russians still adhered to the Greek Orthodox religion, if they had instituted parliamentary government, and if they had a completely free press which daily vituperated us, then—provided they still had armed forces as powerful as they have now—we should still hate them if they gave us ground for thinking them hostile. There is, of course, the *odium theologicum*, and it can be a cause of enmity. But I think that this is an offshoot of herd feeling: the man who has a different theology feels strange, and whatever is strange must be dangerous. Ideologies, in fact, are one of the methods by which herds are created, and the psychology is much the same however the herd may have been generated.

You may have been feeling that I have allowed only for bad motives, or, at best, such as are ethically neutral. I am afraid they are, as a rule, more powerful than more altruistic motives, but I do not deny that altruistic motives exist, and may, on occasion, be effective. The agitation against slavery in England in the early nineteenth century was indubitably altruistic, and was thoroughly effective. Its altruism was proved by the fact that in 1833 British taxpayers paid many millions in compensation to Jamaican landowners for the liberation of their slaves, and also by the fact that at the Congress of Vienna the British Government was prepared to make important

concessions with a view to inducing other nations to abandon the slave trade. This is an instance from the past, but present day America has afforded instances equally remarkable. I will not, however, go into these, as I do not wish to become embarked in current controversies.

I do not think it can be questioned that sympathy is a genuine motive, and that some people at some times are made somewhat uncomfortable by the sufferings of some other people. It is sympathy that has produced the many humanitarian advances of the last hundred years. We are shocked when we hear stories of the ill-treatment of lunatics, and there are now quite a number of asylums in which they are not ill-treated. Prisoners in Western countries are not supposed to be tortured, and when they are, there is an outcry if the facts are discovered. We do not approve of treating orphans as they are treated in *Oliver Twist*. Protestant countries disapprove of cruelty to animals. In all these ways sympathy has been politically effective. If the fear of war were removed, its effectiveness would become much greater. Perhaps the best hope for the future of mankind is that ways will be found of increasing the scope and intensity of sympathy.

To sum up our discussion: Politics is concerned with herds rather than with individuals, and the passions which are important in politics are, therefore, those in which the various members of a given herd can feel alike. The broad instinctive mechanism upon which political edifices have to be built is one of co-operation within the herd and hostility towards other herds. The co-operation within the herd is never perfect. There are members who do not conform, who are, in the etymological sense, "egregious", that is to say, outside the flock. These members are those who have fallen below, or risen above, the ordinary level. They are: idiots, criminals, prophets, and discoverers. A wise herd will learn to tolerate the eccentricity of those who rise above the average, and to treat with a minimum of ferocity those who fall below it.



As regards relations to other herds, modern technique has produced a conflict between self-interest and instinct. In old days, when two tribes went to war, one of them exterminated the other, and annexed its territory. From the point of view of the victor, the whole operation was thoroughly satisfactory. The killing was not at all expensive, and the excitement was agreeable. It is not to be wondered at that, in such circumstances, war persisted. Unfortunately we still have the emotions appropriate to such primitive warfare, while the actual operations of war have changed completely. Killing an enemy in a modern war is a very expensive operation. If you consider how many Germans were killed in the late war, and how much the victors are paying in income tax, you can, by a sum in long division, discover the cost of a dead German, and you will find it considerable. In the East, it is true, the enemies of the Germans have secured the ancient advantages of turning out the defeated population and occupying their lands. The Western victors, however, have secured no such advantages. It is obvious that modern war is not good business from a financial point of view. Although we won both the world wars, we should now be much richer if they had not occurred. If men were actuated by self-interest, which they are not—except in the case of a few saints—the whole human race would co-operate. There would be no more wars, no more armies, no more navies, no more atom bombs. There would not be armies of propagandists employed in poisoning the minds of Nation A against Nation B, and reciprocally of Nation B against Nation A. There would not be armies of officials at frontiers to prevent the entry of foreign books and foreign ideas, however excellent in themselves. There would not be customs barriers to ensure the existence of many small enterprises where one big enterprise would be more economic. All this would happen very quickly if men desired their own happiness as ardently as they desire the misery of their neighbours. But, you will tell me, what is the use of these Utopian dreams? Moralists will see to it that we

do not become wholly selfish, and until we do the millennium will be impossible.

I do not wish to seem to end upon a note of cynicism. I do not deny that there are better things than selfishness, and that some people achieve these things. I maintain, however, on the one hand, that there are few occasions upon which large bodies of men, such as politics is concerned with, can rise above selfishness, while, on the other hand, there are a very great many circumstances in which populations will fall below selfishness, if selfishness is interpreted as enlightened self-interest.

And among those occasions on which people fall below self-interest are most of the occasions on which they are convinced that they are acting from idealistic motives. Much that passes as idealism is disguised hatred or disguised love of power. When you see large masses of men swayed by what appear to be noble motives, it is as well to look below the surface and ask yourself what it is that makes these motives effective. It is partly because it is so easy to be taken in by a façade of nobility that a psychological inquiry, such as I have been attempting, is worth making. I would say, in conclusion, that if what I have said is right, the main thing needed to make the world happy is intelligence. And this, after all, is an optimistic conclusion, because intelligence is a thing that can be fostered by known methods of education.

## CHAPTER III

### *Forethought and Skill*

MAN differs from the other higher mammals in various ways, in all of which, man being the judge, it is thought that men are superior to other animals. The differences are not much concerned with the congenital apparatus of impulse and passion. A new-born baby differs little from a new-born puppy or kitten except in being more helpless. The cycle of hunger, lamentation, rage and repletion is much the same in a human infant as in infants of other mammalian species. It is not in the raw material of passion and impulse that human beings are peculiar in the animal kingdom, but in certain broad capacities which may be grouped under two heads as those belonging to intelligence and those belonging to imagination. Both intelligence and imagination afford new outlets for the passions without changing them fundamentally. It is melancholy, and at first sight perplexing, that, although both intelligence and imagination enable men to find new means of satisfying their desires and indulging their impulses, neither has so far increased the happiness of human beings, or even enabled it to maintain the level which it had reached when apes first became men. Consider for a moment the comparison of two typical individuals: one, a monkey in a tropical forest, swinging from branch to branch in skilful gymnastics, gathering bananas and coconuts and indulging unrestrainedly every impulse of pleasure or fury that the moment may bring; the other, an employee in a city firm, living in a dismal suburb, waked by an alarm clock long before he has any impulse to leave his bed, breakfasting hastily, harassed throughout the day by fear of the displeasure of superiors, and returning wearily in the evening to familiar

monotony. Can you honestly maintain that the man is happier than the monkey? And yet the man in question is much happier than the majority of the human race. He is not subjected to alien domination, he is not a slave, a prisoner, a member of a forced-labour camp, or a peasant in time of famine. In view of all these considerations, it cannot be said that man has used his intelligence and imagination as wisely as he is apt to think. There *is* a human happiness, as opposed to that of other animals, of which human beings are capable and which some human beings achieve. It would be completely useless to attempt to revert to purely animal happiness, for animal happiness is punctuated by disaster in the way of starvation or sudden death, and to human beings, with their power of thought, a life exposed to such hazards cannot be a happy one. But the happiness which is distinctive of man, though now rare, could be nearly universal. The things that make human life miserable are preventable, and the ways of preventing them are known. Why, then, are these ways not adopted? The answer to this question is tragic and complicated. The following chapters will be concerned to set it forth.

Let us begin with some psychological considerations that are necessary in the explanation of this enormous human folly. There is, to begin with, a broad distinction between passion and intelligence: passion determines what ends men will seek, and intelligence helps them to find means to those ends. But within the sphere of passion, there is a distinction which is too often overlooked: I mean the distinction between impulse and desire. An act is impulsive when it is done without conscious purpose. There are, to begin with, all the reflexes; and, beyond these, there are the things that people do when, as it is said, they are overwhelmed by ungovernable passion. A man in a fury will do things which, if he thought for a moment, he would know to be unwise. A man parched with thirst may drink to the point of causing himself serious physical injury. A man who has expectations from a rich uncle whom he hates

may, on occasion, be unable to conceal his hatred. In all such cases there are acts to which we are impelled almost as irresistibly as we are impelled to sneezing or coughing—almost, though not quite. Conscious desire, on the other hand, thinks first of a state of affairs which is hoped for, and then looks for means of bringing about this state of affairs. Conscious desire, in so far as it prevails, leads to control of impulse, since impulse often prompts actions which, from the point of view of conscious desire, are unwise. To this control, however, there are limits. If an impulse is strong, it is very painful to control it, and there is reluctance to admit that, if uncontrolled, it will lead to misfortune. A dipsomaniac and a drug addict are obvious examples, but there are many examples which, though less obvious, are much more important. It is pleasant to resent injuries. It is pleasant to attribute our lack of success to the machinations of enemies. It is pleasant to indulge the feeling of power in overcoming obstacles which arises in moments of passion. The pleasure of indulging impulse and the pain of restraining it, are both so great that men deceive themselves as to the consequences of indulgence. A slogan such as "Justice will triumph", or "Right will prevail", is merely the protest of impulse against calculation, as may be seen by the fact that, in a dispute, both sides equally appeal to such encouraging falsehoods, and therefore both sides equally conclude that conciliation would be pusillanimous.

It cannot be said that the control of impulse beyond a point is desirable. In extreme forms, such as an impulse to murder, it must be controlled either by the individual or by the law. But a life in which impulse is controlled beyond a point loses its savour and becomes joyless and anaemic. Impulse must be allowed a large place in human life, but ought not to lead, as in fact it does, to vast systems of individual and collective self-deception.

Intelligence has been used, broadly speaking, to control impulse in the interests of conscious desire. The distinction

may be illustrated by very simple kinds of behaviour. When an animal is hungry and food is before it, it eats on impulse, and there is not that gulf between the present and the future which is characteristic of conscious desire. The animal then does nothing further in the way of looking for food until appetite revives. A human being, on the other hand, when he has had an adequate meal, realizes that he will presently be hungry again and takes steps to secure future meals. In doing this, he is acting upon desire rather than upon impulse. I do not pretend that desire as opposed to impulse is absent in the life of animals; still less, that impulse as opposed to desire is absent in the life of human beings. What I am saying is that, owing to intelligence, desire as opposed to impulse controls a much larger part of the actions of men than of those of animals.

Intelligence, as exemplified in human history, has two main forms: forethought and skill. I shall begin with forethought.

Forethought is an offshoot of memory. Man is less dominated by the immediate sensible environment than animals are. Hunger, as we observed a moment ago, is remembered by human beings when it is not felt, and is therefore guarded against by storing food. It is true that animals also store food in certain cases—bees store honey and squirrels store nuts—but I think it is reasonable to suppose that they do this from a direct impulse to the actions involved and not from a realization of their agreeable consequences later on. Everybody would admit a similar view in regard to sex. I have never met anybody who supposed that animals indulged in sex from a desire for offspring. No doubt the squirrel finds the same sort of direct pleasure in burying nuts as it does in sex. Human beings, however, are different from squirrels and bees in this respect. They do things in which they find no immediate pleasure whatsoever, because they believe that these things are means to future satisfactions. Sometimes the future satisfaction is quite distant. When Joseph warned Pharaoh that the seven fat years were going to be succeeded by seven lean years, he

induced the King to store the surplus grain of the fat years seven years in advance of the time when it would be needed. When railways began to be built into the Middle-West with a view to supplying grain to Europe, the lapse of time between the turning of the first sod and the consumption of the first loaf produced from Middle-Western crops was at least as long.

Forethought is the most important of all the causes that make human life different from that of animals. It has become gradually more dominant with the lapse of time. The first really important stage was the adoption of agriculture, which was motivated by the fact that in summer people foresaw the hunger they would feel in winter. It has gone on increasing its hold through government, law, armies, tools and modern machines. Consider the importance of capital in modern national and international economy. "Capital" is one of those words which, because they are familiar, are used without adequate realization of what they mean. Capital is primarily a means towards the production of consumable commodities. One may take a railway as typical. You cannot eat a railway. It is not a good place on which to lie down and sleep. In fact it serves no *direct* purpose whatever. Its purpose is merely to make it easier to supply people with various things other than railways that give them satisfaction. This, at least, is its ultimate human purpose. Owing to the complexities of our economic system it has quite other proximate purposes, namely, to supply profit to those who build it. But, in the long run, it will not continue to serve these proximate purposes unless it is a means to the satisfaction of consumers, for, if it is not, it will not carry enough goods and passengers to yield a profit. Capital has of course other forms less concrete than a railway or a factory. Above all, capital takes the form of credit. But all its forms have this in common, that they involve the postponement of present consumption for the sake of more abundant consumption at a later time. They are thus essentially dependent upon forethought for their very existence.

Interest on capital is due to the existence of a certain amount of forethought—but not too much. Suppose I have £100 which I invest at 5 per cent: that means that I am at least as pleased by the prospect of £105 a year hence as by the spending of £100 now. If I had infinite forethought, any rate of interest, however low, would suffice to induce me to invest my capital rather than spend it all at once. One may perhaps infer that, other things being equal, the more forethought people have, the lower will be the rate of interest, but it would take me too far from my theme to pursue such speculations further.

Let us consider for a moment the extent to which forethought dominates the life of an ordinary civilized individual. As a child, he himself has less forethought than an adult, but adults impose their own forethought by compelling him to spend a great part of his time in school where he has to do things towards which he has not the faintest impulse. The time comes when he realizes that education is necessary, if he is to earn a living. He then acquiesces in the educational process, not from impulse, but from forethought. As soon as he is old enough, he spends his working hours in activities which he would never have chosen but for the income that they will bring. If he marries and is a reputable citizen, he forgoes many pleasures for the sake of his children, which again is due to forethought as to their future. Unless he is somewhat exceptional, he guards his tongue, expressing those opinions which will further his advancement, and concealing any which might be thought unorthodox. If he has the ordinary share of ambition, he hopes for success in his work, and is dominated by forethought as to how success is to be achieved. In the end, prudence itself becomes an impulse, and the rest of his instinctive life is atrophied. This is not a fancy picture. It is the actual biography of nine average citizens out of ten in every civilized country.

Public affairs are equally dominated by forethought. There are the law and the police, there is public education, there is the whole vast apparatus of government, there are armies and



navies and air forces, and, at the apex of the whole structure, there are a few very clever men who are considering the most efficient way of exterminating rival populations. There is, it is true, a very very tiny fraction of public expenditure which has no purpose except to give pleasure. There are public parks, which sometimes contain swings and see-saws for the delectation of children. At the seaside there are piers and esplanades. But even parks and piers do not wholly escape from the domination of bureaucratic killjoys: they always have prominent notices telling you all the things you must not do, but they hardly ever have notices telling you of the pleasant things you may do.

I have spoken of various ways in which forethought is inimical to happiness, but it would be entirely misleading to end the discussion of forethought on this note. Although it must be admitted that in many directions there is an excess of forethought, there are other directions, perhaps even more important, in which there is too little. The most important of these are the prevention of war, the increase of food supply, and the limitation of population. These are problems which the future will have to solve, and which it will not solve without new kinds of forethought. But on these matters I will say no more at present.

Intelligence, we said, takes two main forms: forethought and skill. I come now to the part played by skill in human development.

Skill is not wholly confined to human beings. Many animals possess various kinds of it. But the part which it plays among men is so very much greater than the part which it plays even among the most developed of other animals as to make the difference of degree amount almost to a difference in kind.

Let us, to begin with, be clear as to what we mean by "skill". I mean by "skill" the practice of activities on account of some effect which it has been found that these activities will have. It should, I think, be added that the activities must be such as would not be engaged in but for knowledge of their desired effects. The accumulation and transmission of acquired

skills would have been impossible without language except in very simple cases. The origin of language is wrapped in total obscurity. No one knows when either speech or picture-writing began, but it is clear that without them it would be very much more difficult for a man who has made a discovery to cause it to be known to others. Another thing of which the origin is completely prehistoric is fire. Agriculture, which introduced the first really important change in social life, seems to have begun very shortly before the dawn of history, probably through a combination of accident with forethought. It has been suggested—I do not know with what truth—that it was discovered through the practice of scattering grain on tombs for the nourishment of the deceased, and that, to the surprise of pious relatives, the grain grew up and produced fresh grain. It was a not very difficult exercise of forethought to pass from this observation to the deliberate planting of grain with a view to a future harvest. However this may be, agriculture was already well established in the river valleys of the Nile, the Indus and Mesopotamia at the earliest moment of which we have historical, as opposed to archaeological, evidence.

Probably the domestication of sheep and cattle preceded the beginning of agriculture. It involved very much less change in men's habits than was involved in agriculture, since it left them still nomadic. The transition from a nomadic life depending upon flocks and herds to the settled life characteristic of agriculturists has proceeded very slowly, and has been taking place even in our own day in such regions as Outer Mongolia. Domestic animals were useful not only, like sheep and cattle, for food and clothing, but also as a source of power in traction and as a means of increasing speed and diminishing fatigue in locomotion. The horse, which was a latecomer among domestic animals, had at first a mainly military use, and gave to the tribes which employed it a decisive superiority in battle over those who depended upon the ass.

The manufacture of weapons, which goes far back into

prehistoric times, had originally two purposes of about equal importance: namely, war and hunting. It is not known at what stage our ancestors became meat-eaters, but it is obvious that even the most primitive weapons made it easier to kill animals for meat than it had been. As time went on, the importance of weapons in war came to outweigh their importance in hunting, and, from the time of Archimedes to the present day, improvement in weapons of war has been the main incentive to scientific progress.

Progress in technical skill has proceeded at a very uneven rate at different periods of history. After the development of agriculture and the domestication of animals, nothing of equal importance occurred until quite recent times. Peasants in the Nile Valley, five thousand years ago, were not so very different in the matter of skill from their successors of a hundred years ago. But during the past two centuries a complete transformation has taken place, first in a few Western countries and gradually throughout the world. The whole of this transformation is due to new skills.

It is an odd thing how bits of knowledge can lie dormant for centuries and suddenly become vital factors in civilization. The magnetic properties of certain rocks in Magnesia were observed by the Ancients, but never led them to the mariner's compass.<sup>1</sup> They observed also some of the electrical properties of amber, but it was only in our own day that electricity began to play a part in industrial technique. Many fundamental discoveries have been the accidental reward of restless curiosity. One of the best examples of this is the first discovery of radio-activity by Becquerel. He put some lumps of pitchblende into a dark cupboard in which there happened to be some photographic plates. When he took the plates out later on, he found that the pitchblende had photographed itself, in spite of being in complete darkness.

<sup>1</sup> The Chinese are said to have invented a "south-pointing chariot" but the facts are uncertain.

Industrial skill has very much increased the tendency, which began with agricultur<sup>e</sup>, to lengthen the process from a want to its satisfaction. An animal cannot allow more than a few hours to elapse in the activity of seeking food, whereas an agriculturist, even of the most primitive sort, allows several months to elapse between the first activity in food production and the final eating of the food. In the modern world, the process is enormously longer and more complex. The farmer uses machinery which has to be transported by road or rail from an urban centre. The machinery itself is made from raw materials which equally have to be transported. The farmer, as a rule, does not consume his own crop. It goes to a mill and thence, very likely, to some distant country. In this long intricate combination of forethought and skill, there is, throughout, a dependence upon an elaborate social and economic organization, which may break down, with disastrous consequences, in time of war. The journey from primitive hunger and food-gathering to modern agriculture and food-distribution is so long, and the result is so complex, that it is scarcely possible to see and remember the natural impulses out of which the whole system has grown by the application of intelligence.

Let us now return to a question which was touched on earlier in this chapter: has the increase of intelligence, and especially of skill, increased or diminished the average happiness of mankind? It might have been expected that such a question could not reasonably be asked, for, since all skill consists in the discovery of easier ways to satisfy our desires, one might have supposed that of course increase of skill would mean lessening of labour and smoother roads to the fulfilment of our needs. But this, in fact, has not been the course of human history. New skills have not at first been equally the property of all men. They have almost always been monopolized by a minority, and that minority have used them to increase their control over other men. The consequence has been that, although the minority profited, the majority became more subject to the

power of the few. Agriculture, by tying the cultivator to his plot of land, made it easy to enslave him, and produced, wherever it prevailed, a system of slavery or serfdom, which made the life of the cultivator of the soil far less free and far less happy than that of the nomad. Forethought produced governments and armies which established property rights favourable to the holders of power, and enabled them to live in luxury while the bulk of the population worked harder for less reward than in a more primitive state of affairs. A very similar process was repeated with the introduction of industrialism everywhere except in the United States. The beginnings of industrialism in Britain, France, Germany and, later, in Russia, China and Japan were harsh and cruel in the highest degree. Paradoxically, every "labour-saving" device increased the hours of labour, and diminished the wages paid for that labour. These unfortunate results were due everywhere to the uneven distribution of power. They are to be seen at their worst now in Communist countries, where power is more completely concentrated in the hands of a small minority than it is anywhere else. There is only one cure for these evils, and that is the more equal distribution of power throughout the whole community.

There is another evil, even more difficult to cope with, which has resulted from the development of new skills. Every species of animal which survives must have a certain balance between its impulses and the opportunities offered by the environment. When, for any reason, the environment offers new opportunities in certain directions, the balance may be upset. Bears love honey, and in a state of nature they cannot easily get it. As a rule, therefore, they get only as much honey as is good for them. But, if they suddenly learnt the art of keeping bees and became able to get as much honey as they wanted, they would presumably all become very ill and perhaps the whole species would die out. Its only hope would lie in the development of an ascetic morality teaching that the pleasure

in honey is sinful. This is exactly what has happened with human beings in the case of alcohol. Savage tribes, which are unaccustomed to it, are quickly ruined if traders are allowed to supply them freely with fire-water. Fortunately, among civilized people the increase in the alcoholic content of drinks has been gradual, so that at every stage a large proportion of the population have been able to survive the perils of dipsomania.

More serious than this instance is the power impulse. Most energetic men possess this impulse in a high degree. In a loose community of primitive food-gatherers, it has not much scope and is probably useful to the tribe when the tribe is at war with some other tribe and needs a leader. But, with every increase in organization, the scope for the power impulse increases, so that power-loving individuals become like the bears who suddenly have access to too much honey, or the savages who are suddenly supplied with whisky. That is why elaborate safeguards in the form of Rights of Man and democratic government become important in highly organized communities.

The most important form that the power impulse takes at the present day is rivalry. When men could only fight with sharp flints or with spears, and when the human population of the globe was small, fighting between tribes could lead to complete victory by the stronger tribe and perhaps to something deserving to be called survival of the fittest. There was therefore no Darwinian reason for diminution of the impulse to rivalry. But with every new skill in the art of war this has become less true, and at the present moment warlike skill is the chief danger facing the continuation of our species.

So much for the debit account in the matter of intelligence. There are, however, very important items on the credit side. The main use that has been made of intelligence so far is to increase the numbers of the human population of the globe. I do not know how far this can be considered a merit. If all were happy, it clearly would be. But if most are miserable there does not seem much advantage in increasing the number of sufferers.

This question is especially important as regards food. Hitherto, skill has enabled increase of food production to keep pace with increase of population, but there is every reason to fear that this is ceasing to be the case. A new problem has been raised by what is undoubtedly one of the greatest benefits conferred by skill: namely, the diminution of illness and the increase in the average length of life. Intelligence *can* make this an unmitigated boon, but only if it applies itself to the problem of preventing over-population.

Whether, on the balance, intelligence will prove to have been a boon or a curse to mankind, we cannot yet know. But one thing is clear: if it proves a curse, it will be only because it has been not sufficiently intelligent. Man cannot return to the thoughtless happiness of animals. The happiness of which he is capable must be won by the help of intelligence, and, if he fails to achieve it, it will be, not through excess, but through defect in his most distinctively human quality.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Myth and Magic*

THE behaviour of human beings differs from that of animals not only owing to forethought and skill, but also, and almost as much, owing to imagination. No doubt the higher animals must have imagination in some degree. One can observe dogs dreaming, apparently, like Norse heroes, of the pleasures of the chase. But the extent of animal imagination must remain conjectural, and it is pretty clear that the actions of animals are not, like those of human beings, largely governed by vast edifices of belief that stem from imagination.

When we examine the grounds upon which human beings believe this or that, we find that they are of two sorts. They may believe something on the basis of evidence such as would be considered relevant in a scientific investigation or a law court, or they may believe solely because what they are believing *feels* right. As Tennyson says:

If e'er when faith had fall'n asleep,  
I heard a voice "believe no more"  
And heard an ever-breaking shore  
That tumbled in the Godless deep;  
  
A warmth within the breast would melt  
The freezing reason's colder part,  
And like a man in wrath the heart  
Stood up and answer'd "I have felt."

In Tennyson's day what the heart felt was the creed of a liberal Churchman. In earlier epochs it had felt that witches ought to be burnt or children sacrificed or parents eaten. The evidence for Tennyson's beliefs was no better and no worse than the evidence for these earlier beliefs. On the whole, as men become more civilized, the sphere of evidence in the formation of beliefs



becomes larger, and the sphere of imagination smaller. But even in the most civilized communities the function of imagination in determining beliefs and supporting institutions is very great.

Although the beliefs suggested by imagination, if true, are true only as a matter of luck, they are nevertheless essential to human survival. The things that can be *known* in a scientific sense are not easily come by, and no one could long survive without the help of scientifically unwarrantable credulity. Credulity can of course lead to disaster: rats will eat food that contains rat-poison. But if, before eating, they were to subject their food to scientific analysis, they would die of hunger meanwhile, and so they are well advised to take the risk. But it is not only in such elementary ways that unfounded beliefs may be useful. They are useful also as supplying hypotheses which may later turn out to be scientifically justified. It is not only in the arts and in the refining of human relations that imagination is valuable. In the purest and driest parts of science it is as necessary as in lyric poetry. I am saying this by way of preliminary, since a great part of what I shall have to say will be concerned with the misfortune and anguish that unfounded imaginative beliefs have brought upon mankind from the dawn of history to the present day.

Imagination in itself does not involve belief. Poets do not suppose that their fictions have reality.

And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name.

But as Shakespeare immediately goes on to point out, imagination which is sufficiently vivid induces belief in the thing imagined:

Such tricks hath strong imagination.  
That, if it would but apprehend some joy,  
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;  
Or in the night, imagining some fear,  
How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

One may perhaps conjecture that the hold which imagination has had on men's beliefs began through dreams. Dreams are sometimes so vivid and so apparently weighted with portent that even scientifically trained minds may find it difficult to shake them off and to reject their apparent significance in regard to things to come. In antiquity hardly anybody doubted their importance as omens, and many among ourselves, while not consciously accepting this ancient superstition, may find that we are oppressed throughout a whole day by the sombre weight of some unusually horrible nightmare. Freud has popularized the theory that dreams give expression to our wishes. No doubt this is true of a percentage of dreams, but I think dreams are just as apt to give expression to our fears. Freud avoids this conclusion by reflexions which seem to me unduly cynical. He thinks that if you dream that your dearest friend is dead, that shows that you really hate him and would like him to be dead. This seems to me nonsense, and I think it is even more obviously absurd to suppose that wishes inspire dreams in which oneself is subjected to torture. This matter is not unimportant, for it is out of the realm of dreams, and the cognate realm of daydreams, that men have fashioned the vast systems of magic and ritual and myth and religion which have influenced human life at least as profoundly as the skills and observations out of which scientific knowledge has grown. Almost without exception, these systems, from voodoo to Calvinist theology, have been inspired more by fear than by any other one motive, and although wish-fulfilment has played its part in showing how to avoid what is feared, the fear itself has been to a very great degree the product of imagination.

I do not pretend that this is always the case with imaginative beliefs. Some of them have no great emotional content, but feel to the believer the sort of thing that one might expect. I had a parlourmaid who believed that people born in March are specially liable to corns. Aristotle believed that the bite of the shrew-mouse is dangerous to horses, especially if the mouse is

pregnant. Most uneducated people believe that the weather is affected by the phases of the moon. Pythagoras thought it dangerous to leave the impress of the body on the bed when getting up. A considerable percentage of English people believe that the English are the Lost Ten Tribes. Instances of such beliefs could be multiplied indefinitely, but where they have no roots in some deep emotion, they are as a rule not socially important.

Socially important irrational beliefs almost all spring from one thing in human nature, which is the tendency to think that what is of emotional importance to the individual or the race must be of causal importance in the outer world. According to temperament and circumstances, some men will feel that the world cannot be so cruel as to thwart their ardent hopes, while others, in whom fear is the prevailing passion, will expect the horrors that they dread, and invent myths to rationalize their apprehension. Both errors alike spring from self-importance. It is difficult to believe that the external world is indifferent to our hopes and fears. We can imagine it to be kindly, or we can imagine it to be hostile, but most people at most times have found it almost impossible to imagine that the outer world cares nothing as to whether our wishes are fulfilled or thwarted.

This is connected with another source of irrational belief: namely, the tendency to think that causes in nature must be something like our own desires and feelings. Eruptions and earthquakes seem like manifestations of anger, and so we imagine an angry spirit which is causing them. A kindly spirit, on the other hand, sends the rain that makes crops grow. Lifeless matter is difficult to imagine, and becomes less puzzling if we people the forest with tree-spirits and the springs with naiads. Until the time of Galileo, it was thought that matter would not keep on moving if left to itself. Aristotle thought that the planets required forty-nine or perhaps fifty-five gods to keep on pushing them in their orbits. The conception of a

purely physical, self-acting causation is very modern, and has only prevailed, in so far as it has prevailed, by resisting the solicitations of our imaginative system of beliefs.

Beliefs which have no basis in observation or reason are an index to the dominant passions of those who invent them. From this point of view, human history is very dark and dreadful. The kinds of action prompted by superstition have usually been cruel, and most of the myths that men have invented have added imaginary sufferings to those that were real. The ritual dances of savages are terrifying, and are apt to be the prelude to some unnecessary act of cruelty such as human sacrifice. In any account of early man, or of savages in our own day, you will find innumerable horrors inflicted because they are thought to serve a useful purpose, but you will find hardly any kindly customs resulting from irrational belief. Cruelty based on superstition was less prevalent in the Graeco-Roman world than it had been at earlier times, in spite of the fact that purely frivolous cruelty, such as that of Roman games, was very common. But throughout the Dark Ages and the Middle Ages, superstitious cruelty was again widespread, especially in the persecution of heretics and witches.

The myths embodied in most religions gave expression to the fear of death. Most pre-Christian religions taught that the dead, if they survive at all, survive unhappily. Christianity, until quite recently, taught that the great majority of mankind would suffer eternal torment. This is no longer the teaching of the Church, and witchcraft and heresy are not punished as they were. Perhaps one may draw from these changes the conclusion that fear and cruelty have not as great a hold upon modern men as they had in earlier centuries. At any rate, I think one may say this of Western countries and of India and Ceylon. In Communist countries new forms of theological cruelty have arisen, and I doubt whether optimism is justified where they are concerned.

The history of man has shown at most times and in most

places an irrational fear of happiness, which has been a cause of an immeasurable load of unnecessary misery. It would, I think, be shallow to regard this aversion from happiness as applying only to the happiness of others. There is deep in most human nature a feeling that one's own happiness is dangerous. Ascetic impulses have very deep roots. The Greeks dreaded Nemesis and felt that hubris would<sup>\*</sup> be punished. Most of us are afraid to boast of good health or good fortune from a superstitious feeling that to do so will bring bad luck. This feeling survives in us as a feeling, even though we may be firmly persuaded that it has no justification. But in civilized modern men this is no more than a pale ghost of the passion for self-abasement that has seized upon various communities at earlier times. In the Christian world and also in India, asceticism has been the mark of a saint, and the highest degree of holiness has been reserved to celibates. The things that men have thought pleasing to the gods throw a strange light upon their own emotions. Why should Moloch have rejoiced in the sacrifice of children? I think a part of the explanation must be that happiness was thought wicked, and a savage god seemed to rationalize this feeling. Another part of the explanation of this and other religious sacrifices is that people supposed the god must value what they considered precious, and that in giving up their most precious possessions to him they would be giving him conclusive proof of their devotion. The same sentiment, though in a less cruel form, became part of Christian piety, as exemplified, for instance, in the hymn:

If Thou shouldst call me to resign  
What most I prize, it ne'er was mine.  
I only yield Thee what is Thine.  
Thy will be done.

Why did St. Augustine decide that unbaptized infants go to Hell? I do not think it was from hatred of infants. I think the psychological root was hatred of himself. Hatred of oneself is a

commoner emotion than is sometimes thought, and it is apt to find its outlet in cruelty towards others. The men who sacrificed their children to Moloch felt that they themselves deserved to suffer at his hands, but they hoped that their children's sufferings would satisfy him.

The sense of sin or guilt is part of a whole system of feelings which have to do with the correlative, though opposite, desires to dominate and to be dominated. Most people have both, though in some the one is stronger, and in others, the other. The wish to be dominated is quite as profound and spontaneous as the wish to dominate. It is only the existence of both that has made possible the persistence through many centuries of systems of social inequality. Kings, priests and aristocracies are rendered possible by the fact that, while some find pleasure in commanding, others find apparently equal pleasure in obeying. And even those who command most absolutely find satisfaction in the belief that there are heavenly Beings, or that there is a heavenly Being, even more powerful than themselves and deserving from them the same kind of submissiveness as they obtain from their subjects. In all social institutions that have any strength there is this hierarchical order of leaders and followers, the leaders at one step of the hierarchy being the followers at another. This is true, more particularly, in the sphere of religious belief. The men who invent religions, or cause them to be widely accepted, are exceptional men in whom religion plays a much larger part than it does in the lives of ordinary men and women even in the most religious communities. What it is that is exceptional in a religious leader varies from man to man, and from one religion to another. There is a certain type in which both the impulses, towards command and towards submission, are exceptionally strong. I think Loyola might be taken as an almost perfect instance of this type. For a man with this mentality the concept of sin, with its appropriate surroundings of myth, is exactly suitable. He himself, in relation to God or the gods, is a miserable sinner. He

can abase himself in the solitude of private prayer without loss of face in regard to other men. He can seek forgiveness by forgoing pleasures, and by the voluntary endurance of pains which, he believes, are less than the pains of Hell and may be accepted in lieu of them. In this way, when his imagination has created heavenly powers in relation to which he can confess himself to be but a worm, his impulses to submission are fully satisfied without becoming at any point an obstacle to his impulses of dominion. On the contrary, since all men are sinners, and since he is engaged in a heroic struggle with his own sinfulness, he has every right to use the strength of character obtained by self-discipline in the equally delectable task of disciplining others. From his own asceticism he passes easily to the task of depriving others of the pleasures which he has forgone, and, although to us he may seem to be engaged in the pursuit of power, he appears before the bar of his conscience as engaged in the enforcement of virtue. Most stern moralists are in the habit of thinking of pleasure as only of the senses, and, when they eschew the pleasures of sense, they do not notice that the pleasures of power, which to men of their temperament are far more attractive, have not been brought within the ban of their ascetic self-denial. It is the prevalence of this type of psychology in forceful men which has made the notion of sin so popular, since it combines so perfectly humility towards heaven with self-assertion here on earth. The concept of sin has not the hold upon men's imaginations that it had in the Middle Ages, but it still dominates the thoughts of many clergymen, magistrates and school-masters. When the great Dr. Arnold walked on the shores of the Lake of Como, it was not the beauty of the scene that occupied his thoughts. He meditated, so he tells us, on moral evil. I rather fear that it was the moral evil of school-boys rather than school masters that produced his melancholy reflexions. However that may be, he was led to the unshakable belief that it is good for boys to be flogged. One of the great rewards that a belief in sin has always offered to

the virtuous is the opportunity which it affords of inflicting pain without compunction.

Human imagination, by the invention of myths, has created a cosmos consonant to our preconceptions, a cosmos in which causation is passionate and is an expression of love or hate, in which there are heavenly powers to be placated by the same means that are found efficacious with earthly monarchs, in which the whole gamut of human emotions is projected upon the outer world in all its variegated confusion. We love, therefore the gods may be kind; we hate, therefore the gods may be cruel; we wish to obey unquestionable authority, and are therefore pious; we wish to exert unquestionable authority, and therefore believe ourselves mouthpieces of God; we feel fear, and we grovel; we feel hope, and we raise our eyes to heaven. Each emotion in turn finds its embodiment in myth. Fear produces the terror of ghosts; hope produces the anticipation of heaven. If there are earthquakes, it is because we have sinned. If the crops prosper, it is because we have been pious. The whole process of causation in the outer world is along the lines of our own feelings. Not that it is all as we could wish, but that, when it is not, this is due to the anger of powerful beings. The world is like a large quarrelsome family, uncomfortable at times, but always cosy and homelike.

The world that science, during the last four centuries, has been gradually presenting for our acceptance, is very different and has very different credentials. The man of science asks us to believe it, not because it is what we expect, but because it is what we find; not because poetic vision suggests it, but because the slow accumulation of facts makes it probable. The further physics has penetrated into the secrets of the material world, the more alien that world has been found to be from anything that we can imagine. Although it is only through the senses that we know the physical world, in so far as we do know it, we are nevertheless being driven to the conclusion that the physical world is in all likelihood so different from the



world of our sense-perceptions that the most we can know of it is its abstract logical structure. Imagination has not been dethroned, but has become a constitutional monarch. It can no longer invent freely, but only within the limits allowed by scientific method. Within these limits, it is true, it finds new scope. Dante could traverse the universe of his time in twenty-four hours, but the universe of the modern astronomer, even though you travel with the speed of light, takes many millions of years to traverse, and beyond its outermost bounds, countless nebulae, each about as vast as the Milky Way, are perpetually toppling over the edge into eternal invisibility. This new world of astronomy is vast, but cold. Nowhere is there anything in which the longing for human warmth can find comfort, and so the upholders of ancient systems complain of materialism and say that science is forgetting spiritual values. Those who speak in this way are compelled to overlook what myth has done for mankind—the long ages of human sacrifice, of cruel rites, of burnings at the stake, and punishment of those who sought knowledge. They have to forget the cruelty which men have attributed to their gods through making their gods in their own image. They have to forget Hell and the fear of Hell and the morbid anguish with which for many centuries that fear oppressed the human spirit. They have to forget that, in so far as the world of myth has been purged of its cruelty, this has happened in reluctant response to science. Knowledge has been the liberator by destroying the mythical excuses for cruelty.

All this, it may be said, has been true of science in the past, but has now ceased to be true. Science, it may be said, has now entered upon a new realm of destruction which threatens mankind with far worse things than ever came out of the darkest superstition. The danger is real and no sane man will minimize it, but if it is to be successfully combated it will not be by a return to ancient myths, or by acquiescence in the present-day myths that are leading mankind towards destruction. If

salvation is to be found, it must be by the help of more science, not less; it must be by an understanding of man and his impulses, and by the discovery of ways in which his impulses can be led towards happiness and contentment, rather than, as in the past and in the present, towards unintended, undesired disaster.

## CHAPTER V

### *Cohesion and Rivalry*

SOCIAL institutions have two main roots in human nature: internally, the correlative impulses to command and to obedience determine the social hierarchy and give authority to government: externally, another pair, cohesion and rivalry, are the determining factors. Impulses of co-operation and impulses of combat are equally primitive. The perpetuation of the species requires co-operation between a male and a female; and wherever infancy is prolonged, as it is in man, it requires something in the nature of the family. We inherit the family from our pre-human ancestry, and it is perhaps the only human group which is completely in line with natural impulses. But the limits of the family are not well-defined. Are those who have the same grandparents to be regarded as belonging to the family? If we answer in the affirmative, then how about those who have the same great-grandparents? Human beings, unlike even the most highly developed animals, can transmit traditions. Very primitive tribes will recite long genealogies and will thus preserve a record of relationships which may be very remote. In this way the family develops into the tribe. The tribe, if it is nomadic, moves as a unit. It gradually develops the authority of a chief, or of a council of elders, whose decision is accepted in difficult situations. It is in this way that the first extension of social cohesion beyond the family has taken place. Further extensions have been mainly the result of rivalry. The natural man thinks well of the members of his own tribe, except when he has some special reason to quarrel with them, but he thinks ill of all other tribes, except precariously when there is an alliance against a common enemy. It is obvious that

in combat the larger tribe is likely to be victorious, and if two tribes form an alliance, they may, while the alliance lasts, be able to overwhelm enemies against whom neither singly could succeed. Through this cause, self-interest tends to enlarge the size of the social group. Gradually self-interest comes to be re-enforced by other sources of cohesion: a common ancestry is invented; common beliefs, perhaps at first enforced by government, come to be gradually accepted; hatred of common enemies is a bond, since there is a tendency to love those who hate what we hate. If such a conglomeration is successful, it comes in time to celebrate common glories. If it is in danger from without, it becomes united by having the same fears. In all these various ways, social units larger than the tribe gradually acquire common sentiments, common hopes and common fears; and when this process has gone far enough, they can act with the same unity as is shown by a primitive tribe.

Some such process has gone to the making of nations, but States have usually been made in a different way. Most States have arisen through conquest, and the bulk of their Subjects have submitted to authority because they must, not because they had any sentiment of kinship with their rulers. Perhaps ancient Egypt was in some degree an exception, for, although it was formed originally by the union of the Upper and Lower Kingdoms, the Nile was such a powerful integrating influence that common sentiments and common beliefs were easily maintained. This is borne out by the fact that Egypt was the most permanent State known to history, with the possible exception of China. Babylonia never achieved anything like the same stability. Sometimes one city was supreme, sometimes another. Mesopotamia throughout its ancient history was distracted by wars to a very much greater extent than occurred in Egypt.

The period of great empires acquired by conquest begins with the wars of Cyrus and continues through the conquests of Alexander and of Rome, through a period of about a thousand

years. Throughout this time, it might have seemed that conquering armies were irresistible and that there was no limit to the extent of territory that a great military leader could bring under his sway. The impact of the Persians in other than military and governmental matters was not very profound, but first the Greeks and then the Romans spread their culture throughout the lands that they acquired, and were accepted with full loyalty by all except the Jews. The Roman Empire in the time of the Antonines had almost the character that in our day we attribute to a nation. The division of East and West, which soon afterwards became a disruptive force, had not yet developed to a dangerous point, chiefly because of the Roman admiration for the Greeks, which caused even a Roman Emperor to prefer the Greek language in his books. Perhaps the Mediterranean world, including Gaul and Britain and Western Germany, might have remained one State if there had been more wisdom and more initiative in those who administered its institutions. It was destroyed, not from within, in spite of its internal weaknesses, but by enemy action from without; and it survived as a sentiment in men's feelings long after it had ceased to exist in the West as an actual government. It is a noteworthy example of what can be done to secure social cohesion by means which begin with nothing but military force.

After the fall of Rome, the West was for a long time given over to the anarchic rule of rivalry, which became as dominant as cohesion had been in earlier centuries. England, France, Spain, and Italy, were split into a number of petty kingdoms. It was only gradually and with many set-backs that cohesion again began to get the upper hand. The Empire of Charlemagne did not last. Holy Roman Emperors and French Kings had little authority over their nominal vassals. The Holy Roman Emperors never acquired effective authority, but the French Kings were at last more successful. Spain was unified by the union of Aragon and Castile under Ferdinand and Isabella, and

by the expulsion of the Moors. England, meanwhile, had emerged from the disunion of early Saxon times, and became united with Scotland by a stroke of dynastic good fortune. The age of discovery led to the creation of several new empires, all of them larger than the Roman Empire. But these new empires had not the stability of Rome. First France, then England, and then Spain lost most of the territory they had acquired in the Western hemisphere.

The same kind of disruption occurred in the Mohammedan world. The Empire of the Caliph broke up into many fragments, which, though nominally re-united under the Turks (except for Morocco and Spain), never again acquired any real unity. It is difficult in the history of the world hitherto to discern any long-term movement either towards more cohesion or towards more rivalry. A mere alternation is all that seems discernible. And this is still true in the most recent history: Austria-Hungary has been disrupted, the British Empire has fallen apart, and even the Indian peninsula, which might have been expected to preserve its unity, has been divided into two by no means friendly States. It is easy to see that this is not the end of the story, but it is the point that the story has reached at the present moment.

When however we pass from politics to economics and culture, the picture is rather different. The economic divisions of the world are less than the political divisions. Until the World Wars, economic divisions had been growing steadily less, commercial relations were world-wide, and the interchange of raw materials, food, and industrial products was less and less affected by political frontiers. Commerce had always been a civilizing influence from the time of the Ionian Cities of Asia Minor in the sixth century B.C., until almost our own day. The Roman Empire had commercial relations with every part of Asia, including China. Throughout the time of the Empire, Italy imported most of its food. When the Empire broke up, and the Roman roads fell into decay and hordes of

robbers infested the countryside, each little district was compelled to live on its own produce, with the result that population rapidly declined and culture almost wholly disappeared. Gradually commerce revived, first through the enterprise of the Italians, and later through that of the Dutch and English; and with commerce, as in ancient times, came civilization in art and science and social life. It may be said with little exaggeration that from an economic point of view the world before 1914 was one unified whole.

In the cultural sphere also there appeared to be a movement towards unification. A common culture has always been almost as great a cause of social cohesion as a common government. When men first lived in cities, each city had its own culture. Upper and Lower Egypt had different gods, and so had Babylon and Ur. But when cities coalesced into empires, their religions coalesced into pantheons, so that the area covered by a common culture grew with the growth of States. It grew, in fact, faster than States did. The Greeks had a common culture in spite of having no political unity. Buddhism produced a cultural unity throughout China, Japan, Tibet, Burma and Ceylon. The Hellenistic culture, which was, roughly speaking, a combination of Greek and Babylonian elements, spread over the regions conquered by Alexander, in spite of the fact that these regions split into several independent states. What was essentially the Hellenistic culture continued in that of the Roman Empire until the time of Constantine. The survival of Christianity in the West after the fall of Rome is one of the most remarkable examples of a common culture surviving political disruption. Meanwhile most of the Eastern territory that had been Christian was lost to Islam. Throughout the Middle Ages there were two Mediterranean cultures, Christian and Mohammedan, not only one, as in Roman times. Indeed one might almost say that there were three, in view of the gradually increasing separation between the Eastern and Western Churches.

West European culture, which had throughout the Dark Ages and the early Middle Ages been territorially circumscribed and intellectually more limited than that of Islam, suddenly at the time of the Renaissance acquired a new vigour, a new prestige, and an immense accession of territory. It owed these things to certain mental qualities, adventurousness, science, and better political systems than those of other cultures. The whole of the Western hemisphere fell under its sway. Missionaries caused it to be respected in the Far East. In India it acquired political dominion. The Turks, who had overrun various Christian countries, were first contained and then driven back.

Many of those who write about different cultures have failed to realize that the culture which the West has been spreading throughout the world owes its strength, not to the Judæo-Hellenic-Roman synthesis, which constituted traditional Christianity, but to other elements which only began to be important at the end of the fifteenth century. The West has stood in the imaginations of the rest of the world, not primarily for Christianity, but for restless adventure, technical skill, ruthless military efficiency and, during the nineteenth century, for certain ideals of liberty, and the practice of constitutional government. Until 1914 it seemed that the spread of these ideas was irresistible and certain. The Russian government, which tried to maintain a traditional absolutism, was threatened by revolutionaries and compelled, in 1906, to take the first step towards parliamentary government. The ancient Empire of China, which had persisted for over two thousand years, was overthrown by the innovating ardour of men who owed their education to the West. Japan, which had been fiercely conservative and isolationist, opened its ports to Western trade and its minds (more or less) to Western ideas. There was every reason to expect that this process would continue until all the world was culturally unified, and the ideas of Jefferson and Macaulay could be preached without contradiction not only



in India but in the plateaus of Tibet and the darkest recesses of African forests. This would no doubt have happened if Europe had not spent its warlike efficiency upon what was, essentially, civil war. By offering the world this spectacle of folly, Europe lost prestige, and other continents were emboldened to assert their cultural independence.

Our Age, like that after the fall of the Western Empire, is one of cultural disruption. Russian Communism, like the religion of the Prophet, is a new militant faith, which has conquered large areas that were formerly Christian. China, without reverting to its ancient traditions, has decided to reject large parts of the Western creed. Africa is in a ferment, of which the outcome is doubtful, but may well prove to be a reversion to primitive savagery. India still retains much of the British heritage, but is not unlikely, under the influence of conservative theologians, to return to the mentality which it enjoyed before the time of Vasco da Gama. Our world, like that of the Dark Ages, is filled with wars and rumours of wars and with a rapid cultural retrogression.

Economic disruption has accompanied the growth of cultural chaos. There is very little trade between Communist and non-Communist countries, and even in the non-Communist parts of the world there is a growing belief in autarchy. It is felt that since industrialism is the source of military power, every country ought to industrialize itself as fast as possible. This requires high tariffs, a lessening of commerce and a diminution in food supplies, combined with a sudden increase in the rate at which populations grow. The tendency of such a state of affairs is to promote a clash of creeds, economic disaster, famine, and war. These evil consequences can only be avoided if mankind decide to conduct their affairs in a manner less insane than that now prevalent.

The West stood in the nineteenth century for Christianity, constitutional government, commerce and scientific technique. The first three have been rejected by the rest of the world, but

scientific technique remains. This is now the only truly international element in the cultures of the world. Turbines and hydrogen bombs are alike on both sides of the Iron Curtain. A scientist who passes, voluntarily or involuntarily, from one side to the other is able at once to continue his work and to find such laboratory facilities as he had previously enjoyed. This unity of science is quite independent of diversity in all other respects. A man who makes a bomb for the Russians is helping to establish what is humorously called the Dictatorship of the Proletariat; a man who makes a bomb for the Americans is helping to establish what, with equal humour, are called the Principles of the Sermon on the Mount. But the two men, in spite of the vast gulf between the two cultures that they support, can, as long as they confine themselves to science and scientific technique, converse together without any consciousness of disagreement. In this respect at least the world remains unified.

There is one other important respect in which the world is more unified than ever before, and that is as to information. Before Columbus, Mexicans and Peruvians did not know of each other's existence, and Europe was ignorant of the Western hemisphere. Throughout the Dark Ages, China played very little part, and Japan played none, in the minds of Western Europeans. When most people could not read, what was known to those who could remained for the most part unknown to the great majority. Now, with the diffusion of newspapers and radio, important events anywhere quickly come to be known to most people in most civilized countries. The result however is not so good as the devotees of enlightenment a century or two ago would have expected. The news that is most quickly and widely diffused is news which is exciting, and the excitements most easily aroused are hatred and fear. Consequently what we learn about potential enemies is not the common humanity which they share with us, but rather their manifold sins and wickedness. Hatred and fear towards possible enemies are

feelings natural to man and having a very long history. If they are not to dominate the relations between different communities, the different communities must either be ignorant of each other like the Aztecs and the Incas, or, since this is now impossible, the information that is given about distant communities must not be biased in the direction of causing horror and alarm. But there is at present little hope of such a mitigation of incitement to hatred.

Neither complete disruption nor complete cohesion has characterized recent developments in the military sphere, which are perhaps at the moment more important than any of the matters we have been considering. From a military point of view there are two great concentrations: that of the Communist Bloc, and that of the Western Powers. Cohesion and rivalry working together from the first clash of savage tribes to the present day, have gradually, by a process which has a terrible inevitability, come to the point where each reaches the greatest development that is compatible with the existence of the other. The more cohesion, the greater is the chance of victory; the more rivalry, the greater is the motive to cohesion within each group. The working of these two forces, given sufficient technical efficiency, leads naturally to the concentration of military power in one or other of two rival groups. And this, in turn, if the rivalry continues and the technical efficiency keeps on increasing, can hardly have any end except mutual annihilation. If it is to have a less tragic end, rivalry must learn to take less destructive forms. Can men learn to find it as delightful to defeat each other in sporting events, as to kill each other? Can they learn to be content with rivalry in the arts and sciences and the amenities of daily life? Can they learn to be content with a life freed from the correlative impulses of fear and ferocity? I do not know; but if they cannot, our species is doomed.

## CHAPTER VI

### *Scientific Technique and the Future*

THE discovery of how to utilize atomic energy is one of the most important that mankind have ever made. Attention has been mainly concentrated hitherto upon its importance in warfare, but it would be quite wrong to neglect its possible peaceful uses. It will very soon be supplying new sources of power that can be used especially in transport on land, on sea, and in the air. It has already proved itself very useful in medicine and it may in time cure nearly as many people as it will kill. Other, more spectacular, possibilities lie in the future. The Soviet Government has talked of using atomic power to divert the course of the Yenisei and thereby turn large deserts into fertile plains. Perhaps it will become possible, sooner or later, to melt the Polar ice and so totally change the climate of Northern countries. But such possibilities are as yet speculative. What is fairly certain is that in many directions it will replace coal and oil as a source of energy and will thereby make labour more productive.

Given secure peace, it is of course a gain to mankind when ways are found of increasing the productivity of labour. But in time of war, or when there is an imminent threat of war, everything that makes labour more productive is a misfortune, since it sets free a greater proportion of the energies of nations for the business of mutual extermination. From this point of view the discovery of ways of releasing the energy hitherto locked up within the atomic nucleus has been so far an unmitigated misfortune. Whether it will continue to be so depends upon the power of nations and States to adapt themselves to a wholly new situation. It is the opinion of eminent men of

science, among whom Einstein is the most eminent and one of the most emphatic, that, if atomic warfare is not curbed, it will probably before the end of the present century bring about the complete extermination of mankind, and perhaps of all animal life. There is nothing in traditional statesmanship to enable either politicians or the citizens whom they represent to meet such a threat. Ever since men were first organized into armed States there has been one simple rule: make your armaments stronger than those of any enemy whom you are likely to have to fight, and you will either frighten him into keeping the peace or be victorious if he decides on war. Since both sides adopt this maxim, it makes wars as bloody as the existing state of industry permits, but it has not hitherto made victory impossible, nor has it, as a rule, caused any very vital danger to neutrals. In the near future, unless quite novel political devices are adopted, these conditions will fail. I do not say that they will necessarily fail if war breaks out tomorrow, for as yet it is probable that when both sides have expended the whole of their pre-war stock of bombs there will still be human beings left alive in the world; and it is also probable that each side would be able to produce such disorganization on the other side as would prevent the manufacture of fresh bombs while the war continued. But this is a temporary and rapidly diminishing basis for a glimmer of hope. With the progress of scientific skill, bombs will grow more deadly and their manufacture will become cheaper. When they become sufficiently numerous, they will produce radio-active clouds which will drift with the wind, paying no attention to political frontiers and bringing death to one region after another. This is the prospect if the old methods of statecraft continue unchanged.

Although atom and hydrogen bombs are at the moment in the forefront of men's imaginations when they think of the disasters that science may bring, there is no reason to believe that the danger which they present is greater than that from other scientific sources. Bacteriological warfare has not yet

been tried out in practice, but it is being carefully considered on both sides of the Iron Curtain. There are men who profess to have in a small bottle a sufficient supply of deadly micro-organisms to destroy the whole human race. It is as yet uncertain how far such methods can be successfully practised in war, but it would not be reasonable to suppose that the necessary discoveries will be long delayed. Some sentimentalists deplore such methods on the ground that the diseases spread among the enemy might cross the frontier, but I think a certain increase in ferocity might prevent this misfortune. The practice of taking prisoners would of course have to cease, since it would have become dangerous. This perhaps neither side would much regret. What would be felt to be more serious is that it would no longer be safe to send spies to enemy countries. Nor would conquerors dare to occupy what had been enemy territory until every human being formerly occupying the territory had either fled or died. But given all these precautions, military men, who are apt to suffer from optimism, might hope to exterminate only the enemy by means of the plagues that they would spread. Since both sides would entertain this hope, it is probable that both sides would succeed in damaging the enemy, but not in escaping equal damage to themselves.

There are other less spectacular ways of producing disaster. The soil could be poisoned so as to be no longer fertile, or disease could be spread among crops instead of among human beings. It is impossible to foresee any limits to the harm which scientific ingenuity can enable men to inflict upon each other. As yet there is no sign that men shrink from the last extremity in the way of mutual extermination. On both sides of the Iron Curtain, hydrogen bombs are being manufactured as fast as possible, and on both sides it is hoped that they will prove decisive. As yet the powerful men who determine the policies of nations see no alternative to this race towards mutual suicide.

Is there not in the human race sufficient common sense to

avert this catastrophe which no one desires? The difficulty is that, although no one desires the result, the measures required for preventing it are so contrary to ingrained mental habits that it is very difficult to persuade men of their necessity. It is so difficult that I think it will require a number of years to produce the necessary change of outlook, and in the meantime we must hope that the outbreak of a Third World War will be prevented by such makeshifts and expedients as from time to time seem available. If a new World War is somehow prevented, it is possible to hope that in the course of the next ten or twenty years even politicians will become capable of understanding public affairs in the new terms that are now necessary.

If men are to escape from the consequences of their own childish cleverness, they will have to learn, in all the powerful countries of the world, or at any rate in America and Russia, to think, not of separate groups of men, but of MAN. Never before has man as man been in danger, never before have the rivalries of different groups threatened universal extinction. It has become an anachronism to think of politics in terms of possible victory. If the human race is to persist, this truth will have to be acknowledged and acted upon, not only by the Western Powers, but also by those which are now dominated by the antiquated nineteenth century philosophy derived from Marx. Such a hope may at the moment seem visionary, but I do not feel convinced that even Communist rulers will persist indefinitely in a policy if it becomes entirely evident that they cannot in this way achieve the world dominion to which their missionary zeal, as well as their love of power, impels them.

Every increase of skill demands, if it is to produce an increase and not a diminution of human happiness, a correlative increase of wisdom. There has been during the last hundred and fifty years an unprecedented increase of skill and there is no sign that the pace of this increase is slackening. But there has not been even the slightest increase of wisdom. The maxims of statecraft are still those that were in vogue in the eighteenth

century. The slogans by which men win elections are just as foolish as they used to be. Short-sighted greed blinds communities to their long-run interests quite as much as it ever did. Skill without wisdom is the cause of our troubles. If they are to be cured, it will be not by a mere increase of skill, but by the growth of such wisdom as the times demand. We shudder at the thought of the extermination of Man, but it is not enough to shudder. It is the imperative duty of us all in the perilous years that lie ahead to struggle to replace the old crude passions of hate and greed and envy by a new wisdom based upon the realization of our common danger, a danger created by our own folly, and curable only by a diminution of that folly. When you hate, you generate a reciprocal hate. When individuals hate each other, the harm is finite; but when great groups of nations hate each other, the harm may be infinite and absolute. Do not fall back upon the thought that those whom you hate deserve to be hated. I do not know whether anybody deserves to be hated, but I do know that hatred of those whom we believe to be evil is not what will redeem mankind. The only thing that will redeem mankind is co-operation, and the first step towards co-operation lies in the hearts of individuals. It is common to wish well to oneself, but in our technically unified world, wishing well to oneself is sure to be futile unless it is combined with wishing well to others. This is an ancient doctrine, which has been preached by wise men in many ages and in many lands—hitherto in vain. But now at last, if any of us are to survive, practical politics must learn to take account of a kind of wisdom which practical men have hitherto thought too good for this world.



## CHAPTER VII

### *Will Religious Faith Cure Our Troubles?*

THERE is a theory, which is winning wide-spread acceptance in the Western World, to the effect that what is afflicting the nations is due to the decay of religious faith. I think this theory completely contrary to the truth. In so far as faith has anything to do with the matter, there is a great deal more faith in the world than there was at a somewhat earlier time. But, in actual fact, the chain of causation which has led to the perilous position in which we find ourselves is, as I shall try to show, almost wholly independent of men's beliefs, which are an effect rather than a cause of what is amiss.

What has happened in the world since 1914 has proceeded with a kind of inevitability that is like that of Greek tragedy. It is an inevitability derived, not from external circumstances, but from the characters of the actors. Let us briefly trace the steps in this development.

The Germans in 1914 thought themselves strong enough to secure by force an empire comparable to those of Britain, France, and Russia. Britain, France and Russia combined to thwart this ambition. Russia was defeated and, in the Revolution of 1917, abandoned its traditional Imperialistic policy. The West had promised Constantinople to the Russians, but, when the Russians made a separate peace, this promise fell through. Britain and France, with the help of America, defeated the Germans after the Germans had defeated the Russians. The Germans were compelled to accept the humiliating Treaty of Versailles and to profess a belief in their sole war-guilt. They were "wicked" because they had made war. The Russians were "wicked" because they had made a separate peace, and,

still more, because they had repudiated their war debts. All the victorious nations combined to fight Russia, but were defeated, and were somewhat surprised to find that Russia no longer loved them. The Germans meanwhile suffered great distress, which was much aggravated when the folly of the American Republican Government brought about the Great Depression. Suffering produced hysteria, and hysteria produced Hitler. The Western nations, hoping that Hitler would attack Russia, did not oppose him. They had opposed the comparatively blameless Weimar Republic, but in befriending Hitler they proved to all mankind that they were totally destitute of moral standards. Hitler, fortunately, was mad, and, owing to madness, brought about his own downfall. The West had been delighted to accept Russia's help in bringing about this result, and, whereas at the end of the First World War Russia and Germany had been alike weak, Russia at the end of the Second World War was strong. Britain was traditionally hostile to Russia, but from 1907 to 1917 had been forced into a semblance of friendship with that country by fear of Germany. At the end of the Second World War a quite new international pattern developed. Western Europe had ceased to count. Russia and the United States were alone powerful. As has always happened in the past in more or less similar situations, these two Great Powers were mutually hostile. Each saw a chance of world hegemony. Russia inherited the policy of Philip II, Napoleon and the Kaiser. America inherited the policy which England had pursued throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In all this there was nothing new except technique. The conflicts of Great Powers were just what they had always been, except that technique had made Great Powers greater and war more destructive. The situation would be exactly what it is if Russia still adhered to the Orthodox Church. We in the West should, in that case, be pointing out what we consider heretical in the Greek Church. What our propaganda would be can be seen by anybody who reads the records of the Crimean War.

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I am not in any way defending the present Russian régime any more than I should defend the Czarist régime. What I am saying is that the two are closely similar, although the one was Christian and the other is not. I am saying also that, if the present Government of Russia were Christian, the situation would be exactly what it is. The cause of conflict is the ancient clash of power politics. It is not fundamentally a clash between faith and un-faith, or between one faith and another, but between two mighty Empires, each of which sees a chance of world supremacy.

Nobody can pretend that the First World War was in any degree due to lack of Christian faith in the rulers who brought it about. The Czar, the Kaiser, and the Emperor of Austria were all earnest Christians. So was Sir Edward Grey, and so was President Wilson. There was only one prominent politician at that time who was not a Christian. That was Jean Jaurès, a Socialist who opposed the war and was assassinated with the approval of almost all French Christians. In England the only members of the Cabinet who resigned from disapproval of the War were John Burns and Lord Morley, a noted atheist. In Germany likewise the only opposition came from atheists under the leadership of Liebknecht. In Russia, when the atheists acquired power, their first act was to make peace. The Bolsheviks, it is true, did not remain peaceful, but that is hardly surprising in view of the fact that all the victorious Christian nations attacked them.

But let us leave the details of politics and consider our question more generally. Christians hold that their faith does good, but other faiths do harm. At any rate, they hold this about the Communist faith. What I wish to maintain is that *all* faiths do harm. We may define "faith" as a firm belief in something for which there is no evidence. Where there is evidence, no one speaks of "faith". We do not speak of faith that two and two are four or that the earth is round. We only speak of faith when we wish to substitute emotion for evidence.

The substitution of emotion for evidence is apt to lead to strife, since different groups substitute different emotions. Christians have faith in the Resurrection, Communists have faith in Marx's Theory of Value. Neither faith can be defended rationally, and each therefore is defended by propaganda and, if necessary, by war. The two are equal in this respect. If you think it immensely important that people should believe something which cannot be rationally defended, it makes no difference what the something is. Where you control the government, you teach the something to the immature minds of children and you burn or prohibit books which teach the contrary. Where you do not control the government, you will, if you are strong enough, build up armed forces with a view to conquest. All this is an inevitable consequence of any strongly-held faith unless, like the Quakers, you are content to remain forever a tiny minority.

It is completely mysterious to me that there are apparently sane people who think that a belief in Christianity might prevent war. Such people seem totally unable to learn anything from history. The Roman State became Christian at the time of Constantine, and was almost continually at war until it ceased to exist. The Christian States which succeeded to it continued to fight each other, though, it must be confessed, they also from time to time fought states which were not Christian. From the time of Constantine to the present day there has been no shred of evidence to show that Christian States are less warlike than others. Indeed, some of the most ferocious wars have been due to disputes between different kinds of Christianity. Nobody can deny that Luther and Loyola were Christians, nobody can deny that their differences were associated with a long period of ferocious wars.

There are those who argue that Christianity, though it may not be true, is very useful as promoting social cohesion, and, though it may not be perfect, is better than any other faith that has the same social effectiveness. I will admit that I would

rather see the whole world Christian than Marxist. I find the Marxist faith more repellent than any other that has been adopted by civilized nations (except perhaps the Aztecs). But I am quite unwilling to accept the view that social cohesion is impossible except by the help of useful lies. I know that this view has the sanction of Plato and of a long line of practical politicians, but I think that even from a practical point of view it is mistaken. It is not necessary for purposes of self-defence where rational arguments suffice. It is necessary for a crusade, but I cannot think of any case in which a crusade has done any good whatever. When people regard Christianity as part of re-armament they are taking out of it whatever spiritual merit it may have. And, in order that it may be effective as re-armament, it is generally thought that it must be pugnacious, dogmatic and narrow-minded. When people think of Christianity as a help in fighting the Russians, it is not the Quaker type of Christianity that they have in view, but something more in the style of Senator McCarthy. What makes a creed effective in war is its negative aspect, that is to say, its hatred of those who do not adopt it. Without this hatred it serves no bellicose purpose. But as soon as it is used as a weapon of war, it is the hatred of un-believers that becomes prominent. Consequently, when two faiths fight each other each develops its worst aspects, and even copies whatever it imagines to be effective in the faith that it is combating.

The belief that fanaticism promotes success in war is one that is not borne out by history, although it is constantly assumed by those who cloak their ignorance under the name of "realism". When the Romans conquered the Mediterranean world, fanaticism played no part in their success. The motives of Roman Generals were either to acquire the gold reserves of temples with a view to keeping half for themselves and giving half to their soldiers, or, as in the case of Caesar, to gain the prestige which would enable them to win elections in Rome and defy their creditors. In the early contests of Christians and

Mohammedans it was the Christians who were fanatical and the Mohanimedans who were successful. Christian propaganda has invented stories of Mohammedan intolerance, but these are wholly false as applied to the early centuries of Islam. Every Christian has been taught the story of the Caliph destroying the Library of Alexandria. As a matter of fact, this Library was frequently destroyed and frequently re-created. Its first destroyer was Julius Caesar, and its last antedated the Prophet. The early Mohammedans, unlike the Christians, tolerated those whom they called "people of the Book", provided they paid tribute. In contrast to the Christians, who persecuted not only pagans but each other, the Mohammedans were welcomed for their broadmindedness, and it was largely this that facilitated their conquests. To come to later times, Spain was ruined by fanatical hatred of Jews and Moors; France was disastrously impoverished by the persecution of Huguenots; and one main cause of Hitler's defeat was his failure to employ Jews in atomic research. Ever since the time of Archimedes war has been a science, and proficiency in science has been a main cause of victory. But proficiency in science is very difficult to combine with fanaticism. We all know how, under the orders of Stalin, Russian biologists were compelled to subscribe to Lysenko's errors. It is obvious to every person capable of free scientific inquiry that the doctrines of Lysenko are less likely to increase the wheat supply of Russia than those of orthodox geneticists are to increase the wheat supply of the West. I think it is also very doubtful whether nuclear research can long continue to flourish in such an atmosphere as Stalin produced in Russia. Perhaps Russia is now going to become liberal, and perhaps it will be in the United States that bigotry will hamper atomic research. As to this, I express no opinion. But, however this may be, it is clear that, without intellectual freedom, scientific warfare is not likely to remain long successful.

But let us look at this matter of fanaticism somewhat more

broadly. The contention of those who advocate fanaticism without being fanatics is, to my mind, not only false, but ignoble. It seems to be thought that unless everybody in a nation is compelled, either by persecution or by an education which destroys the power of thought, to believe things which no rational man can believe, that nation will be so torn by dissensions or so paralyzed by hesitant doubts that it will inevitably come to grief. Not only, as I have already argued, is there no historical evidence for this view, but it is also quite contrary to what ought to be expected. When a British military expedition marched to Lhasa in 1905, the Tibetan soldiers at first opposed it bravely, because the Priests had pronounced charms which afforded protection against lead. When the soldiers nevertheless were killed, the Priests excused themselves on the ground that the bullets contained nickel, against which their charms had been powerless. After this, the British troops encountered little opposition. Philip II of Spain was so persuaded that Heaven must bless his warfare against the heretics that he neglected entirely to consider the difference between fighting the English and fighting the Turks, and so he was defeated. There is a very widespread belief that people can be induced to believe what is contrary to fact in one domain while remaining scientific in another. This is not the case. It is by no means easy to keep one's mind open to fresh evidence, and it is almost impossible to achieve this in one direction, if, in another, one has a carefully fostered blindness.

There is something feeble, and a little contemptible, about a man who cannot face the perils of life without the help of comfortable myths. Almost inevitably some part of him is aware that they are myths and that he believes them only because they are comforting. But he dare not face this thought, and he therefore cannot carry his own reflections to any logical conclusion. Moreover, since he is aware, however dimly, that his opinions are not rational, he becomes furious when they are

disputed. He therefore, adopts persecution, censorship, and a narrowly cramping education as essentials of statecraft. In so far as he is successful, he produces a population which is timid and unadventurous and incapable of progress. Authoritarian rulers have always aimed at producing such a population. They have usually succeeded, and by their success have brought their countries to ruin.

Many of the objections to what is called "faith" do not depend in any way upon what the faith in question may be. You may believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible or of the Koran or of Marx's *Capital*. Whichever of these beliefs you entertain, you have to close your mind against evidence; and if you close your mind against evidence in one respect, you will also do so in another, if the temptation is strong. The Duke of Wellington never allowed himself to doubt the value of the playing fields of Eton, and was therefore never able to accept the superiority of the rifle to the old-fashioned musket. You may say that belief in God is not as harmful as belief in the playing fields of Eton. I will not argue on this point, except to say that it becomes harmful in proportion as you secretly doubt whether it is in accordance with the facts. The important thing is not what you believe, but how you believe it. There was a time when it was rational to believe that the earth is flat. At that time this belief did not have the bad consequences belonging to what is called "faith". But the people who, in our day, persist in believing that the earth is flat, have to close their minds against reason and to open them to every kind of absurdity in addition to the one from which they start. If you think that your belief is based upon reason, you will support it by argument, rather than by persecution, and will abandon it if the argument goes against you. But if your belief is based on faith, you will realize that argument is useless, and will therefore resort to force either in the form of persecution or by stunting and distorting the minds of the young in what is called "education". This last is peculiarly dastardly, since it



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• takes advantage of the defencelessness of immature minds. Unfortunately it is practised in a greater or less degree in the schools of every civilized country.

In addition to the general argument against faith, there is something peculiarly odious in the contention that the principles of the Sermon on the Mount are to be adopted with a view to making atom bombs more effective. If I were a Christian, I should consider this the absolute extreme of blasphemy.

• I do not believe that a decay of dogmatic belief can do anything but good. I admit at once that new systems of dogma, such as those of the Nazis and the Communists, are even worse than the old systems, but they could never have acquired a hold over men's minds if orthodox dogmatic habits had not been instilled in youth. Stalin's language is full of reminiscences of the theological seminary in which he received his training. What the world needs is not dogma, but an attitude of scientific inquiry, combined with a belief that the torture of millions is not desirable, whether inflicted by Stalin or by a Deity imagined in the likeness of the believer.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Conquest ?*

IN this chapter I wish to consider what part, if any, can be played by military force in the establishment of a single world-wide authority such as could make large-scale wars impossible. In the present state of tension, there is a likelihood, or at least a possibility, that on one side or another apprehension and insecurity may become unbearable. If that happens, it will bring with it a belief that a solution is to be found in victory of our own side (whichever that may be) after a world war in which the other side will have suffered irretrievable defeat. This is in fact one of the chief reasons for uneasiness while the East-West tension lasts. There may easily come a moment when the nervous strain becomes unbearable. For this reason, if for no other, it is worth while to examine what hopes of a happy issue there would be if a world war were to begin in circumstances like those now existing.

If a world war were to begin tomorrow, there would be three logically possible issues: There might be a victory of the West, there might be a Communist victory; or the war might end in a draw. In this last event, there would remain two future possibilities: the resulting peace, like the Treaty of Amiens, might be merely a breathing-space during which both sides would prepare to renew the combat as soon as possible; or it might, like the Treaty of Westphalia at the end of the Thirty Years War, mark the end of an epoch of ideological strife and inaugurate a period of mutual toleration. I do not wish, at the moment, to consider what would happen if the war ended in a draw, leaving the combatants intact as organized States. What I wish to consider is whether any desirable

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form of world government could emerge from the victory of either side.

Let us first consider the hypothesis of a Soviet victory. Painful as such an hypothesis must be to all who are not Communists, I am afraid that, as things are, it must be admitted to be possible. This would not have been the case in the first years after 1945, while America still had the monopoly of the atom bomb. But at that time the American Government had not yet made up its mind that hostility to Russia was inevitable, and the American armed forces, having won their war, were anxious to come home and very unwilling to embark upon another war. Now that the political situation has changed, the military situation also is different, partly because China has become Communist, but still more because Russia possesses atom and hydrogen bombs. The situation therefore is one in which the victory of the West cannot be assumed as a certainty.

What would happen to the world if the Russians were completely victorious, and their armed forces occupied strategic positions in the United States as well as throughout Western Europe? Would it then be possible to establish throughout the world subservient satellite governments such as those which the Russians have established in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia? And would it be possible, by means of such governments, to establish Communist authority firmly throughout the world? I do not for a moment believe it. We have seen already, in Eastern Germany, the difficulty of subduing a Western civilized community. But the population of Eastern Germany is small and its frontiers are close to those of Russia. The problem of holding down by force a very large and bitterly hostile population, such as that of the United States would be, is one which the resources of terrorism and secret police would soon find beyond their powers. An Empire of the East established by conquest would inevitably fall apart as did those of Attila and Timur. If it fell apart and powerful portions of the Western World reconquered their independence, bitterness, hate and

fear would be far more dominant even than they are at present, and all the energies of the West would be absorbed by the hope of revenge. We must conclude therefore that along these lines there is no hope of the creation of a better world, or even of a lasting unification of the world under a tyrannical totalitarian régime.

Let us consider next what would be likely to happen in the event of a Western victory. As to this, I think we may judge from what has been happening in Germany and Japan. In both these countries, in spite of the reluctance of France in the one case and Australia in the other, re-armament is being encouraged, and there is no security that their governments, twenty years hence, will be any better than those overthrown as a result of the Second World War. An outcome similar to this would be even more certain after a victory by the West in a Third World War. Russia and China together are too vast to be held down by force for any length of time. The belief, in America, that the trouble is Communism rather than the rivalry of Great Powers would cause the Russians and Chinese to be quickly forgiven if they made a parade of ceasing to be Communist. Nationalism, which is the real cause of trouble, would remain, and there would soon again be a state of tension analogous to that which exists at present.

For such reasons, I do not think that a great war ending in conquest by either side is likely to bring about any lasting improvement. I am leaving out of account the destruction involved in a great war and the possibility that organized government everywhere might break down. I have been, in what has been said above, accepting the assumptions of militarists as regards the conduct of the war and considering only what, granting these assumptions, will be the result when war once more gives place to politics. If this argument is valid, we must look ultimately to agreement between East and West, and not merely to a supremacy of armed force.

I do not however wish to deny that, if a world government is ever established, some element of force may be involved in

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making it universal. The question, like many others in politics, is quantitative, and must not be dealt with on a basis of abstract principle. What does emerge from our argument is that a world government cannot be established in the face of opposition from large and important countries, especially when that opposition has the bitterness resulting from defeat in war. But if all the powerful nations were agreed, they might still have to bring pressure to bear, especially in the less civilized parts of the world. This pressure no doubt could usually achieve its object without actual war; but, if actual war were necessary in any particular case, it could be a brief war, doing no vital damage to mankind. Such considerations however belong to a somewhat distant future.

A Third World War, however it may end, will, like its two predecessors, solve no problems, but on the contrary create a world even worse than that existing before its outbreak. The aim of statesmanship should be to persuade both sides of this truth, and also to persuade each side that the truth is acknowledged by the other side. We of the West are by no means persuaded that Russia will not embark upon an unprovoked attack. And, although this may seem absurd to us, the Russians equally are not persuaded that we shall abstain from attack if we think the military situation propitious. I do not think the world can improve so long as these mutual suspicions exist. Improvement can only come when each side is persuaded that, although the other side will resist aggression, it will not inaugurate aggression. If both sides were convinced of this, genuine negotiations and a real diminution of tension would become possible. This can scarcely be done while each side is engaged, with all the rhetorical skill at its command, in pointing out the wickedness of the other side. I do not mean to deny the existence of such wickedness. I wish only to say that no useful purpose is served by emphasizing it on both sides. Perhaps the first and easiest step towards pacification would be an agreement on both sides to keep hostile propaganda within bounds.

The next step should be to allow truthful information to cross the Iron Curtain. At present, as everyone realizes, the Russians are not allowed to know the truth about the West. The West is not so well aware of the fact that a great campaign is being waged in America to purge libraries of books that give information about Russia. Such obstacles to mutual understanding do nothing but harm and only inflame the passions leading to the futility of a third useless world conflict.

In what I have been saying hitherto on the subject of a Third World War, I have accepted, as was said above, some of the assumptions habitually made by military men, but I do not think it can be taken by any means as certain that these assumptions will be borne out by the event. If a war begins, as it well may, by the destruction of great cities, the total disruption of communications, and the setting ablaze of oil-fields, it may lead to large armies being left without food, and therefore driven to pillage. And this process might easily end in complete anarchy. In regions and countries that had lived on imported food, a large proportion of the population would die of starvation, while food-producing regions would have to share their crops with marauding soldiery. This would produce a situation like that when the Roman Empire broke up. Great States would melt away, and little local units would take their place. The leaders of robber bands would establish themselves as local despots and supply their bodyguards with adequate food in return for protection against popular fury. Such fighting as would continue would no longer be the grand organized warfare depending upon atom bombs, aeroplanes and oil, but a much more old-fashioned and primitive kind, such as could survive the destruction of all centres of industry. Out of such universal anarchy, mankind would probably climb in the course of a thousand years to a renewal of what is called "civilization", which would enable them, if they had learnt nothing meanwhile, to repeat the whole useless process once more.

This forecast, however, like our earlier ones, perhaps errs on

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the side of optimism. We must not forget the possibility that scientific warfare, before it brings itself to an end, may exterminate the human race. With every year that the Third World War is postponed, this consummation becomes more probable. Shall we, on this ground, hope to see the Third World War break out as soon as possible? Such a hope would be rational if we felt obliged to despair of the possibility of a modicum of self-preservative wisdom in the politicians who direct our destinies and the fanatical public who support them. I, for my part, have not yet reached this depth of despair. I still think that, if war can be averted long enough to give time for the dangers to be widely apprehended, constructive statesmanship may lead the way to the total prevention of large-scale wars. The measures required will be drastic, and will run counter to powerful prejudices, but perhaps the danger will nevertheless force their adoption. What these measures will have to be, I shall consider in another chapter.

## CHAPTER IX

### *Steps Towards a Stable Peace*

IT is as yet a very doubtful question whether human society organized on a basis of scientific technique can or cannot be stable. I have discussed this question in Chapter VII of *The Impact of Science on Society*.<sup>1</sup> I will not therefore discuss it afresh, but will quote the conclusion arrived at in that Chapter:

“My conclusion is that a scientific society can be stable given certain conditions. The first of these is a single government of the whole world, possessing a monopoly of armed force and therefore able to enforce peace. The second condition is a general diffusion of prosperity, so that there is no occasion for envy of one part of the world by another. The third condition (which supposes the second fulfilled) is a low birth rate everywhere, so that the population of the world becomes stationary, or nearly so. The fourth condition is the provision for individual initiative both in work and in play, and the greatest diffusion of power compatible with maintaining the necessary political and economic framework.”

Until these conditions are realized, a scientifically organized world will continue to run certain grave risks. Of these, the most catastrophic is the extinction of the human species in a large-scale war. Short of this, there is a danger of collapse into anarchy and a general lowering of the level of civilization. Such a process must inevitably be accompanied by appalling suffering, since it will involve the death by violence or starvation of about half the population of the globe. Sane men must therefore wish to see the world moving towards the fulfilment of the conditions required for stability. It cannot be said that at

<sup>1</sup> London: George Allen and Unwin.



present the world is travelling in this direction. What hope is there of a more constructive movement in the not too distant future?

War, as was argued in the preceding chapter, does not appear to be a road towards better things, no matter what may be its outcome. Those who place the future of mankind above the game of momentary power-politics must therefore hope that, before an explosion occurs, both sides in the present conflict of East and West will realize its futility and will become willing to give and accept convincing assurances of their mutual determination to preserve the peace.

What could be the first steps in such a process? East and West alike are governed at the moment by fanatics so obsessed by each other's wickedness as to imagine that each other's destruction would bring the millennium. The Soviet Government accepts an ideology according to which hate has always been, and still is, the moving force in human affairs. It believes, with the superstitious fervency of unquestioned dogma, that an internecine struggle between Capitalism and Communism has been decreed by the blind forces of economic determinism, and that this struggle, when it comes, must end, as the Marxist Scriptures foretell, in the world-wide victory of Communism. All this of course is a myth which cannot be accepted by anyone capable of rational thought.

But how is this fanaticism to be prevented from doing its evil work? There is a view, which appears at the moment to be getting an increasing hold upon public opinion in America, that fanaticism can only be combated by fanaticism, that the way to combat Communism is to proclaim the wickedness of Communists, to spread terror of their machinations, and to do everything possible to prevent knowledge and understanding of their outlook.

This is not what statesmanship demands. If, as we have been arguing, the solution of the world's troubles is not to be found in war, it must be found in conciliation and in a gradual

diminution of mutual hate and fear. The difficulty of inaugurating a conciliatory policy arises through the belief on both sides that safety is only to be found in armaments. The population of Russia has to be content with poor food and clothing, inadequate housing, and general hardship, while energy and skill are lavished upon preparations for war. In the United States, Congress has to be persuaded that this is not the moment for lowering the income tax, and it can only be persuaded of this by a vast campaign painting the Soviet menace in the blackest possible colours. One of the things that make this situation so apparently hopeless is that it has on both sides a certain low-level rationality. Each side believes that the other will attack if it has a good hope of victory. Each side is therefore persuaded that its armaments must be strong enough to deter the other side from attack. When either side increases its armaments, the other side's fears are increased, and therefore the other side's armaments are still further increased. Neither side dares to start the conciliatory movement or to emphasize the evils to all mankind that would result from war, for, if it does so, the other side, it is thought, will take such action as a proof of fear and will therefore be encouraged in bellicosity. The situation is exactly like that which used to arise in the days of duelling, when two men, neither of whom wished to kill or be killed, were driven on by the fear of being thought cowardly. Private duelling has died out, but the international duel remains, with exactly the same absurd psychology.

What can be done to lessen mutual suspicion? For the reasons that we have just been considering, it is difficult for either the Communist or the anti-Communist bloc to take the first step. The first step must, I think, be taken by neutral Powers. They have two advantages: one of these is that they cannot be accused of cowardice, the other, which is even more important, is that they can speak to Governments without being suspected of hostility. In Western countries, public opinion is still a force. But to have any influence upon Russia,

it is necessary to be able to persuade the Russian Government—and only Governments can hope to do this with any effect.

I should like to see the Government of India appoint a Commission, consisting solely of Indians, who should be eminent politicians, economists, scientists or military men, the purpose of the Commission being to investigate in a wholly neutral spirit the evils to be expected if the cold war became hot, evils not by any means confined to the belligerents but afflicting neutrals also, though probably in a lesser degree. I should wish the Government of India to present this report to the Governments of all the Great Powers, and to invite them to express either agreement or disagreement with its forecasts. I think that, if the work of the Commission were adequately performed, disagreement would be very difficult. It might in this way become possible to persuade Governments on both sides that neither side could hope to gain by aggression. I do not myself believe that at the present moment either side contemplates aggression, but each side suspects that the other may do so, and this suspicion does almost as much harm as if it were well-founded. What neutrals would have to achieve is to allay this suspicion and to persuade each side to a genuine belief that the other side will only fight if attacked. I do not know whether, in the immediate future, it would be possible to bring about this belief on both sides, but I think it would become much easier to bring about if it were backed by an authoritative neutral investigation demonstrating without bias how little either side could hope to gain by aggression. The arguments of self-interest are so obvious, so conclusive and so overwhelming that, if they were forcibly presented by a Power standing outside the conflict, they ought after a period of consideration to produce their effect both in the East and in the West.

If once it were agreed and acknowledged on both sides that war is not the solution, negotiations would soon become possible and the tension would rapidly grow less. The first step would be to diminish the asperities of official propaganda

and restore traditional courtesies in diplomatic intercourse. The next step would be a Congress to consider all the points in dispute, and to seek such solutions as should give stability rather than such as involved diplomatic victory for this side or that. To anyone not blinded by partisan feeling, it must be obvious that the world cannot settle down while Germany remains divided and while recognition is refused to the *de facto* Government of China. The problem of Germany can only be solved by Russian concessions, and the problem of China can only be solved by American concessions. If each side were genuinely actuated by the wish to diminish the risk of war, such mutual concessions would no longer be so difficult as they are at present. And I think that in bringing about the necessary state of mind on both sides, neutral Powers can play a beneficent and decisive part.

If the immediate causes of tension were removed, whether by the above method or by any other, it would be possible to begin a movement towards the solution of long-range problems. Of these, the first to be tackled would probably have to be the internationalizing of the control of atomic energy. America made a wholly praiseworthy endeavour in this direction at the end of the last war, but Russian suspicions made the endeavour abortive. Since that time Russian suspicions have not grown less, and American suspicions have hardened. We must hope for a reversal of this process, and I think that a reversal has become more possible since both sides have possessed atom and hydrogen bombs.

It will not be easy to induce either Russia or America to surrender absolute national independence, but until this is done the world will not be safe. I think the best that can be hoped is a *détente* during which the fear of war is not imminent, and a gradual growth, while the *détente* lasts, of a realization that certain kinds of liberty, which have seemed very precious, are no longer possible in a planet which technique has made small and overcrowded. Everybody accustomed to urban life accepts

as a matter of course various limitations on liberty which are not necessary in a sparsely populated countryside. The moment a crowd congregates anywhere in a town, the police say, "Pass along, please", and nobody is indignant. The anarchic liberty enjoyed hitherto by nations is just as impossible in the modern world as would be anarchic liberty for either pedestrians or motorists in the streets of London or New York.

But if any kind of international government is to become possible, there must be a diminution of fanaticism. There must be a habit of viewing communities scientifically rather than passionately. It is not by savage detestation of undesirable conduct that it is brought to an end. In the eighteenth century in England thieves were hanged, and there was a great deal more thieving than there is now. If Russian fanaticism is to grow less, it will not be because American fanaticism has grown greater. On the contrary, American fanaticism is a product of Russian fanaticism, and its only probable effect is a reverberation which still further increases the Russian fanaticism that caused it. If the world is to be unified, as it must be if it is to survive, it can only be by a spread of the scientific spirit. I mean by this, not technical cleverness, but the habit of judging by evidence and suspending judgment where evidence is lacking. Science, both for good and evil, is what is distinctive of our time. Fanaticisms, whether Hindu or Moslem or Catholic or Communist, are a legacy of the Middle Ages. One of the first things that would have to be done during a period of *détente* would be a cessation everywhere of governmental encouragement to fanatical blindness and the hatred which it generates.

There are some things that all human beings have in common. One of these—perhaps the most important—is the capacity for suffering. We have it in our power to diminish immeasurably the sum of suffering and misery in the world, but we shall not succeed in this while we allow opposite irrational beliefs to divide the human race into mutually hostile

groups. A wise humanity, in politics as elsewhere, comes only of remembering that even the largest groups are composed of individuals, that individuals can be happy or sad, and that every individual in the world who is suffering represents a failure of human wisdom and of common humanity. The aims of statesmanship should not be abstract. They should be as concrete as the affection of parents for young children. The world needs wisdom and human warmth in equal measure. Both are lacking at the moment, but not, one may hope, forever

## CHAPTER X

### *Prologue or Epilogue?*

MAN, as time counts in geology and in the history of evolution, is a very recent arrival in his planet. For countless millions of years only very simple animals existed. During other countless millions, new types gradually evolved—fishes, reptiles, birds and, at last, mammals. Man, the species to which we happen to belong, has existed for, at most, a million years, and has possessed his present brain capacity for only about half that time. But recent as is the emergence of man in the history of the universe, and even in the history of life, the emergence of his titanic powers, at once terrifying and splendid, is very much more recent. It is only about six thousand years since man discovered his capacity for distinctively human activities. These began, we may say, with the invention of writing and the organization of government. Since the beginning of recorded history progress has not been steady, but has been a matter of fits and starts. After the Age of the Pyramids, the first really noteworthy advance was in the time of the Greeks, and after them there was no further advance of comparable importance until about five hundred years ago. During the last five hundred years changes have occurred with continually increasing frequency, and have at last become so swift that an old man can scarcely hope to understand the world in which he finds himself. It seems hardly possible that a state of affairs differing so profoundly from everything that has existed since first there were living organisms, can continue without bringing some kind of dizziness, some calamitous vertigo, that will end the maddening acceleration in which heart and brain become increasingly exhausted. Such fears are not irrational: the state of

the world encourages them, and the contrast between the hustling present and the leisurely past brings them to the imagination of the contemplative historian.

But when, forgetting our present perplexities, we view the world as astronomers view it, we find ourselves thinking of the future as extending through many more ages than even those contemplated in geology. There appears to be no reason in physical nature to prevent our planet from remaining habitable for another million million years, and if man can survive, in spite of the dangers produced by his own frenzies, there is no reason why he should not continue the career of triumph upon which he has so recently embarked. Man's destiny for many millions of years to come is, so far as our present knowledge shows, in his own hands. It rests with him to decide whether he will plunge into disaster or climb to undreamt-of heights. Shakespeare speaks of

'The prophetic soul  
Of the wide world dreaming on things to come.

Are we to think that the dream is not prophetic? Is it no more than a deceiving vision ending in death? Or may we think that the drama is only just begun, that we have heard the first syllables of the prologue, and as yet no more?

Man, as the Orphics said, is a child of earth and of the starry heaven; or, in more recent language, a combination of god and beast. There are those who shut their eyes to the beast, and there are those who shut their eyes to the god. It is all too easy to make a picture of man as unmixed beast. Swift did it in his Yahoos, and did it in a manner so convincing that to many of us the impress is ineffaceable. But Swift's Yahoos, repulsive as they are, lack the worst qualities of modern man, since they lack his intelligence. To describe man as a mixture of god and beast is hardly fair to the beasts. He must rather be conceived as a mixture of god and devil. No beast and no Yahoo could commit the crimes committed by Hitler and Stalin. There seems



no limit to the horrors that can be inflicted by a combination of scientific intelligence with the malevolence of Satan. When we contemplate the tortures of millions deliberately inflicted by Hitler and Stalin, and when we reflect that the species which they disgraced is our own, it is easy to feel that the Yahoos, for all their degradation, are far less dreadful than some of the human beings who actually wield power in great modern States. Human imagination long ago pictured Hell, but it is only through recent skill that men have been able to give reality to what they had imagined. The human mind is strangely poised between the bright vault of Heaven and the dark pit of Hell. It can find satisfaction in the contemplation of either, and it cannot be said that either is more natural to it than the other.

Sometimes, in moments of horror, I have been tempted to doubt whether there is any reason to wish that such a creature as man should continue to exist. It is easy to see man as dark and cruel, as an embodiment of diabolic power, and as a blot upon the fair face of the universe. But this is not the whole truth, and is not the last word of wisdom.

Man, as the Orphics said, is also the child of the starry heaven. Man, though his body is insignificant and powerless in comparison with the great bodies of the astronomer's world, is yet able to mirror that world, is able to travel in imagination and scientific knowledge through enormous abysses of space and time. What he knows already of the world in which he lives, would be unbelievable to his ancestors of a thousand years ago; and in view of the speed with which he is acquiring knowledge there is every reason to think that, if he continues on his present course, what he will know a thousand years from now will be equally beyond what we can imagine. But it is not only, or even principally, in knowledge that man at his best deserves admiration. Men have created beauty; they have had strange visions that seemed like the first glimpse of a land of wonder: they have been capable of love, of sympathy for the whole human race, of vast hopes for mankind as a whole. These

achievements, it is true, have been those of exceptional men, and have very frequently met with hostility from the herd. But there is no reason why, in the ages to come, the sort of man who is now exceptional should not become usual, and if that were to happen, the exceptional man in that new world would rise as far above Shakespeare as Shakespeare now rises above the common man. So much evil use has been made of knowledge that our imagination does not readily rise to the thought of the good uses that are possible in the raising of the level of excellence in the population at large to that which is now only achieved by men of genius. When I allow myself to hope that the world will emerge from its present troubles, and that it will some day learn to give the direction of its affairs, not to cruel mountebanks, but to men possessed of wisdom and courage, I see before me a shining vision: a world where none are hungry, where few are ill, where work is pleasant and not excessive, where kindly feeling is common, and where minds released from fear create delight for eye and ear and heart. Do not say this is impossible. It is not impossible. I do not say it can be done tomorrow, but I do say that it could be done within a thousand years, if men would bend their minds to the achievement of the kind of happiness that should be distinctive of man. I say the kind of happiness distinctive of man, because the happiness of pigs, which the enemies of Epicurus accused him of seeking, is not possible for men. If you try to make yourself content with the happiness of the pig, your suppressed potentialities will make you miserable. True happiness for human beings is possible only to those who develop their godlike potentialities to the utmost. For such men, in the world of the present day, happiness must be mixed with much pain, since they cannot escape sympathetic suffering in the spectacle of the sufferings of others. But in a society where this source of pain no longer existed, there could be a human happiness more complete, more infused with imagination and knowledge and sympathy, than anything

that is possible to those condemned to live in our present gloomy epoch.

Is all this hope to count for nothing? Are we to continue entrusting our affairs to men without sympathy, without knowledge, without imagination, and having nothing to recommend them except methodical hatred and skill in vituperation? (I do not mean this as an indictment of all statesmen; but it applies to those who guide the destinies of Russia and to some who have influence in other countries.) When Othello is about to kill Desdemona, he says, "But yet the pity of it, Iago. Oh Iago, the pity of it." I doubt whether Malenkov and his opposite number, as they prepare the extermination of mankind, have enough pity in their character to be capable of this exclamation, or even to realize the nature of what they are preparing. I suppose that never for a moment have they thought of man as a single species with possibilities that may be realized or thwarted. Never have their minds risen beyond the daily considerations of momentary expediency in a narrow contest for brief power. And yet there must, in every country, be many who can rise to a wider point of view. It is to men with such capabilities, in whatever country, that the friends of man must appeal. The future of man is at stake, and if enough men become aware of this his future is assured. Those who are to lead the world out of its troubles will need courage, hope and love. Whether they will prevail, I do not know; but, beyond all reason, I am unconquerably persuaded that they will.



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